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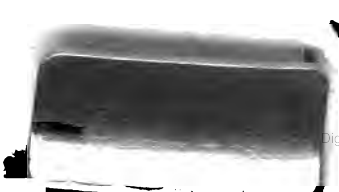

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SERMONS,

BY

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HUGH BLAIR, D.D. F.R.S. Ed.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH,

AND

PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

VOL. V.

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR,

By JAMES FINLAYSON, D.D.

DUBLIN:

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1801.

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TO THE READER.

AFTER the very favourable reception which the Four former Volumes of my Sermons have met with, both at home and abroad, I had reſolved not to preſume on offering any more to the Public. To this publication of another Volume, my preſent ſituation gave riſe. Being now, by the infirmity of very advanced age, laid aſide from all the labours of the pulpit, and poſſeſſing, of courſe, more retirement and leiſure than formerly, it occurred to me, ſometimes, to look back into the Sermons, moſt of which had been compoſed a great many years ago, with a view to obſerve how far they agreed in the ſtrain of thought with thoſe which I had writen at a later period. In reviewing them, paſſages ſometimes appeared which I imagined might be ſerviceable, either for admonition or conſolation to various claſſes

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of perſons; and the thought began to ariſe in my mind, that by employing my preſent leiſure, as long as health allowed, in preparing ſome of thoſe Diſcourſes for the preſs, it might be in my power to be ſtill of ſome uſe in the world. Encouraged by this idea, I went on to reviſe and correct one Sermon after another, often making alterations and additions, till the preſent Volume aroſe.

THOUGH the ſubjects of theſe Sermons be different from thoſe which I formerly publiſhed, ſome of the ſame ſentiments and expreſſions may occaſionally be found to be repeated in them. This is apt to happen partly from that ſimilarity of thought and ſtyle which will run through all the compoſitions of an Author who is not copying others, but writing from his own reflections; and partly, from the coincidence of ſome general topicks and alluſions which recur frequently in ſerious diſcourſes of the practical kind. Where any inſtances of this nature preſented themſelves to my memory, I found, that without

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out altering the ſtrain of the Sermon, I could not altogether ſuppreſs and omit them; and as it is not often they occur, I did not think it requiſite that they ſhould be omitted. If the ſentiment where firſt introduced, was in any degree uſeful or important, the renewal of it, when brought forth under ſome different form, enlarged perhaps, or abridged, or placed in connection with ſome other to pick, may be thought to ſtrengthen and confirm the impreſſion of it.——With regard to errors or inaccuracies of any other kind, the Author muſt truſt to the indulgence of the candid Reader.

HUGH BLAIR.

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SERMON I.

On HOPES and DISAPPOINTMENTS.

PROVERBS, x. 28.

The hope of the Righteous ſhall be gladneſs; but the expectation of the Wicked ſhall periſh.

ATTACHMENT to futurity has a remarkable influence on the operations of the human mind. The preſent, whatever it be, ſeldom engages our attention ſo much as what is to come. Remembrance of the paſt may ſometimes occupy our thoughts; but what for the moſt part fills them, is the anticipation of the future. The

SERM. I.

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SERM. I. preſent is apt to be conſidered as an evaneſcent ſcene, juſt about to paſs away; and in the midſt of wiſhes and deſires, of hopes and fears, which all reſpect futurity, we may be ſaid to dwell. As on theſe the life of man is ſo much ſuſpended, it becomes a very material part both of wiſdom and of duty to attend to any regulations by which they may be properly conducted. For if expectations and hopes on one hand, and fears and alarms on the other, are ſuffered to ariſe with groundleſs precipitancy, and to acquire an undue aſcendant, it is evident that they will produce much deluſion in conduct, and often will engender much vice and guilt. As there is a *hope of the Righteous which ſhall be gladneſs*, ſo there is *an expectation of the Wicked which ſhall periſh*. The anticipations of the former, conducted by prudence and regulated by piety, miſlead him not from his duty, and afford him ſatisfaction in the end. While the expectations of the latter, ariſing from fantaſtic imaginary proſpects, delude him for a while

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while with vanity, and terminate in misery. It will therefore be an useful subject of meditation, to consider, in a few instances, of what we may, and of what we may not, reasonably expect from the world, when we look forward to what is most likely to happen, in the ordinary course of human affairs. SERM. I.

I. We are not to expect the uninterrupted continuance of any measure of health, prosperity, or comfort which we now enjoy. There is the greater reason for beginning with this admonition, as there is a strong propensity in human nature to imagine that what we at present possess is always to remain. When no warnings of any approaching change appear, we are all inclined to look forward to futurity with a smile; and to indulge the hope that *to-morrow shall be as this day* and even *more abundantly*. Hence, in the lives of thoughtless men, there breaks forth so much folly and presumption, so much pride and levity, and often so much impiety and con-

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SERM. I. tempt of religion. *What is the Almighty that we ſhould ſerve him? or what profit ſhall we have, if we pray unto him? Our mountain ſtands ſtrong; and ſhall never be moved.*

On the lot of ſome men Providence is pleaſed to beſtow a longer continuance of proſperity than on that of others. But, as the term of that continuance is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without foundation. At one period or another, it is certain that the calm is to be troubled, and the dark cloud is to ariſe; and how ſoon that period is to come, you cannot tell. In your health, or your fortune, or among your connections and friends, be aſſured that ſome trial awaits you. For human life never ſtands ſtill for any long time.—It is by no means a fixed and ſteady object, like the mountain or the rock which you always find in the ſame ſituation; it is a river continually moving and flowing. Neither is it the ſtill and ſmooth ſtream which glides along with the ſame conſtant tenor; but a river which

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which for a time may hold a regular course within its banks, till, being interrupted by rocks, it foams into a torrent, or, swoln by foreign currents, it lays waste the neighbouring plains.—Amidst such vicissitudes of time and life, who has any title to reckon upon the future?—To faults, all are subject; to troubles, all are exposed. As that man is the most virtuous who can be charged with the fewest faults, so that life is the happiest which suffers the fewest troubles. To look for entire exemption from them is to court disappointment. SERM. I.

At the same time, I do not mean to hold it forth as any precept of religion or wisdom, that we ought always to sadden the present hour by dwelling on the thoughts of future disappointment.—What is given us, let us chearfully enjoy, and render thanks to Him who bestows it. Virtue, conjoined with prudence, may reasonably afford the prospect of good days to come. *For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and*

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SERM. I. *and knowledge, and joy**. Such a prospect therefore he may innocently indulge, if he preserve always that temperance and moderation, that modesty and humility, which become one who knows that his state is ever in hazard of changing. But I mean to warn those who, giving way to the elation of giddy hopes, lose the command of themselves, that by this intoxication of mind they are preparing the way for an alteration of state, they are pushing forward the wheels of advancing change; they are accelerating their own downfall. To them belongs that admonition of the wise man, would they seriously listen to it; *If a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity*†.

II. We are not to expect, from our intercourse with others, all that satisfaction which we fondly wish. What the individual either enjoys or suffers by

* Eccles. ii. 26. † Eccles. xi. 8.

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by himself, exhibits only an imperfect view of his condition. In the present state of human affairs, we are all so closely interwoven with one another, that a very material part of our happiness or misery arises from the connections which we have with those who are around us, and the relations in which we stand to them. These, therefore, open a field within which our wishes and expectations find an ample range. One of the first objects of wish to every one, is to maintain a proper place and rank in society; not to fall behind his equals; but rather, if he can, to surpass them, so as to command consideration and respect from his neighbours. This, among the vain and ambitious, is always the favourite aim. With them it arises to immoderate expectations, founded on their supposed talents and imagined merits. But perhaps, in the hearts of all men, some wish of this nature lurks; some wish not to be over looked in the crowd, but to attain that degree of distinction which they conceive they might reasonably claim.

SERM. I.

With

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SERM. I. With reſpect to claims of this ſort it is to be apprehended that, among perſons of all characters and deſcriptions, many an *expectation muſt periſh*, and many a diſappointment be endured.—For ſuch is the power which the ſophiſtry of ſelf-love exerciſes over us, that almoſt every one may be aſſured that he meaſures himſelf by a deceitful ſcale; that he places the point of his own merit at a higher degree than others will admit that it reaches. All are jealous of the high pretenſions of others. He who ſuſpects a rival in his neighbour, will ſtudy every method of bringing him down to what he takes to be his proper level; nay, often of depreciating him below it. Hence the endleſs mortifications which the vain and ſelf-conceited ſuffer. Hence the ſpleen and reſentment which is ſo often breaking forth, diſturbing the peace of ſociety, and involving it in crimes and miſeries. Were expectations more moderate, they would be more favourably received. Did we more rarely attempt to puſh ourſelves into notice the world would

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would more readily allow us, nay ſome- SERM. times aſſiſt us, to come forward. Were we content ſometimes to remain in the ſhade, we would with more advantage come forth into ſunſhine, and find the brightneſs interrupted by fewer clouds.

In the cloſer connexions which men form of intimate friendſhip and domeſtic life, there is ſtill more reaſon for due moderation in our expectations and hopes. For the nearer that men approach to each other, the more numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater indeed will be the pleaſure of perfect ſymphony and agreements of feelings; but, at the ſame time, if any harſh and repulſive ſenſations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain.—If you look for a friend, or a partner of your life, in whoſe temper there is not to be found the leaſt inequality, who upon no occaſion is to be hurt or offended by any frailties you diſcover, whoſe feelings are to harmonize in every trifle with yours, whoſe countenance is always to reflect the image

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SERM. I. image of your own, you look for a pleaſing phantom, which is never, or, at moſt, very rarely, to be found; and if diſappointment ſour your mind, you have your own folly to blame. You ought to have conſidered that you live in a region of human infirmity, where every one has imperfections and failings. You aſſuredly have your own. What reaſon had you to imagine, that the perſon whom you love and eſteem was to be the only exception from the common fate? Here, if any where, it becomes you to overlook and forbear; and never to allow ſmall failings to dwell on your attention ſo much as to deface the whole of an amiable character. From trifling miſunderſtandings ariſing from the moſt frivolous cauſes, ſprings much of the miſery of ſocial and domeſtic life. Hence is blaſted many a pleaſing bloſſom of hope; and many an *expectation*, which once promiſed unbroken harmony, is left *to periſh*. I ſhall only mention,

III. ANOTHER inſtance of what we are not to expect in the ordinary courſe of

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of human affairs; that is, constant gra- SERM. titude from those whom we have most I. obliged and served. I am far from saying, that gratitude is an unknown, or even a rare virtue among mankind; I think not so ill of human nature. On the contrary, it is my belief, that grateful sensations for favours received are very generally felt; and, when no strong passion counteracts those sensations, that grateful returns are generally intended, and often are actually made. But then, our expectations of proper returns must be kept within moderate bounds. We must not carry them so far as to imagine, that gratitude is to produce unlimited compliance with every desire which we chuse to indulge; or that they whom we have obliged will altogether desert their own interest for the sake of their benefactors. Many circumstances, it is to be remembered, tend to cool the grateful emotion. Time always deadens the memory of benefits. Sometimes they are considered as having been fully recompensed, and the debt of gratitude repaid. As benefits conferred

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SERM. I. ferred are often under-rated by thoſe who receive them, ſo they are ſometimes over-valued by thoſe who confer them. On perſons of light and careleſs minds, no moral ſentiment makes any deep impreſſion; with ſuch, the remembrance of both benefit and benefactor is apt to paſs ſpeedily away. With the proud ſpirit, which claims every thing as its due, gratitude is in a great meaſure incompatible. From perſons of this character, we are never to expect it; and indeed from perſons of any character we are not to be ſurpriſed, if, in the preſent ſtate of the world, it riſes not ſo high as we thought we had reaſon to hope.

HAVING thus ſhown in ſome material inſtances what we have no reaſon to expect in the ordinary courſe of human affairs, I turn next to the brighter ſide of the ſubject, and ſhall ſhow what a wiſe and good man may reaſonably expect from human life.—*His hope ſhall be gladneſs*, although *the expectation of fools ſhall periſh*.

I. WHAT-

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SERM. I.

I. WHATEVER courſe the affairs of the world take, he may juſtly hope to enjoy peace of mind. I am ſenſible that by the ſceptic and the profligate, this will be held as a very inconſiderable object of expectation or hope. To them every enjoyment which is of mental and intellectual nature appears of ſmall value. Give them affluent fortune and flouriſhing health, and they account themſelves ſure of felicity.—But to theſe very perſons I appeal, whether there have not been many occaſions, when the want of a peaceful and ſelf-approving mind has not blaſted all the enjoyments they poſſeſſed? In the midſt of the pomp and luxuries of life, have they never experienced the pangs of a *wounded ſpirit?* Have they never felt what it was to be tormented by the ſenſe of paſt follies, and to be ſtung with the reproaches of an angry conſcience? Dare they ſay that in the midſt of thoſe feelings they were happy? Will they not be conſtrained to own, that in ſuch moments of inward pain, they would willingly have exchanged conditions

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SERM. I. conditions with an innocent peaſant? Let them then learn the value of that object of hope which they affect to contemn, by recollecting what they have ſuffered from the want of it. Aſſuredly, the peace of an approving conſcience is one of the chief ingredients of human happineſs; one of the moſt grateful of all ſenſations to the heart of man: provided always that this ſelf-approbation reſt upon proper grounds; that it be tempered with due humility, and regulated by Chriſtian faith; that it never ſwell into an arrogant opinion of our virtue, or into confidence in our own merits, as if they were ſufficient, without any higher intervention, to render us acceptable to God.

He, whoſe ſtudy it is to preſerve a conſcience void of offence towards God and man, who upon juſt principles can be ſatisfied that he is walking in the path which was appointed by God, will have, in every ſtate of fortune, a ground of hope which may juſtly be denominated *gladneſs*; for peace of mind will not forſake him. Let the world vi-

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brate around him as it will, and repeat all its vicissitudes, he will not be shaken by them. He has always somewhat to rest upon for comfort. Wrapped up in his own integrity, he remains sound and entire within himself; and with a firm mind awaits the coming storm. *He is not afraid of evil tidings; for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord**. As he can look up to a Supreme Power with good hope, so he can look every man in the face without uneasiness, when he is conscious that no man can reproach him with having entrenched upon his neighbour's rights, or having causelessly provoked and attacked him. Hence, a calm mind by day, and undisturbed slumbers by night. Hence, the hope of that continued protection of Heaven which watches over the righteous. *In the time of trouble He shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; He shall set me upon a rock*†. Besides this expectation of internal peace,

SERM. I.

* Ps. cxii. 7. † Ps. xlvii. 5.

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SERM. I. II. A good man has ground to expect that any external condition into which, in the course of human affairs, he may pass, shall, by means of virtue and wisdom, be rendered, if not perfectly agreeable, yet tolerably easy to him. That distresses of various kinds are scattered through the life of every mortal man, there can be no doubt.—But it is also to be remembered, that to many distresses there are remedies which it is in our power to apply; and that with all sorrows some comforts are mixed. So many loud complaints we hear of the inequalities of fortune in the world, that one would imagine the rich and the great to be the only persons who had the privilege of being happy; and that the mean and the poor were doomed, without exception, to be miserable. Be assured, my friends, that the inequality of real happiness is not to be measured by the inequality of outward estate. When you see the peasant chearful in his cottage, and the labourer singing in the fields, you may discern that there is some power in the mind

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minds superiour to external condition; SERM. I. that more depends on the man himself, than on the situation in which the world has placed him. Would you estimate justly the sum of happiness that he enjoys, or the degree of unhappiness that he feels? The questions you are to put, if the man be in prosperity, are not, How much wealth does such a man possess? but, How does he enjoy it? If he be in adversity, not, What is his distress? but, How does he bear it?

Hence arises the hope to a wise and good man of either finding, or making his state tolerable to himself. If he be not wanting to himself, he is never left without resources to assist those exertions which he makes in his own behalf. Roses indeed are not always strewed in his path; but from fields that are seemingly waste, flowers may be gathered by those who look carefully around them. Seldom or never do all good things forsake, and all evils beset a man, at once. In some corner of our lot there are always comforts that may be found, if we be not so

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SERM. I. fooliſh as to overlook them. Even in the intervals of ſickneſs and pain, ſatisfactions may be enjoyed. Returns of relief are often felt with a more lively ſenſation of pleaſure, than what we taſte in unbroken health. It has been often obſerved that what is very ſevere of any kind, ſeldom laſts long; and the uneaſineſs which laſts, we become accuſtomed to bear. Time and continuance reconcile us gradually to many things that were at firſt believed to be inſupportable. Providence has in mercy provided this gentle opiate to aſſuage various ſorrows of human life. What we behold others around us bearing, we learn to think may alſo be borne by us. *The ſpirit of man will long ſuſtain his infirmities:* From the treaſures of his own mind in reflection and meditation, much relief will ariſe to the virtuous; and at the bottom of the moſt diſconſolate eſtate, there lies always a ſecret hope that better days may come.—From ſuch circumſtances as theſe, the expectation of paſſing through life with ſome meaſure of comfort, may reaſonably be entertained by

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by ſuch as are not wanting to themſelves in propriety of conduct. In looking forward to futurity, the proſpect we are to take of the world is not that which is ſometimes gloomily indulged, of a forlorn region where nothing is to be beheld but dreary and inhoſpitable waſtes, and no objects are to be met with but ſerpents that hiſs, and wild beaſts that devour. The proſpect is rather that of a mixed region, where indeed rugged rocks are ſeen, and deſerts extend, over which the tempeſt ſometimes ſcowls but where alſo many peaceful habitations and fruitful fields occur to refreſh the ſight. Once more, SERM. I.

III. We have ground to expect from the ordinary courſe of human affairs, that if we perſevere in ſtudying to do our duty towards God and man, we ſhall meet with the eſteem, the love, and confidence of thoſe who are around us. I before obſerved, that in our expectations of receiving what we think the reſpect and conſideration from the world, we ſhall be often diſappointed.

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SERM. I. But that observation was applied to the claims we make on others, on account of talents, abilities, and superiour merits. To such claims the world is seldom disposed to give a favourable reception. We live amidst rivals and competitors whose self-estimation prompts them to depreciate us, and of course subjects us to many a mortification. The case is different with respect to moral qualifications. There the world is more ready to do justice to character. No man is hurt, at least few are so, by hearing his neighbour esteemed a worthy and honourrable man. This praise will be bestowed without grudging, by many who value themselves on the possession of qualities, which they conceive to be of superiour importance in the judgment of the world.

But whatever they may think, it is certain that the basis of all lasting reputation is laid in moral worth. Great parts and endowments may sparkle for a while in the public eye. The world looks up to them with wonder, as an extraordinary comet, or a blazing star.

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Distinguished virtue and worth create less astonishment; but, like the fixed luminaries of heaven, they shine with more steady and permanent lustre. Unaffected piety conjoined with inviolable uprightness and integrity in conduct, command a degree of respect which approaches to veneration. Candour and firmness never fail to attract esteem and trust. Kindness and benevolence conciliate love, and create warm friendships.—The best character may indeed for a time be accidentally obscured and misunderstood. But the world commonly judges soundly in the end. After a man has acted his part for a while among his fellows, he is known upon trial to be what he is; and if his worth be real and genuine, *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noonday.* SERM. I.

This is what a good man has always ground to look for, even in evil times; and surely, there are few things which he can more desire than the prospect of being valued and esteemed by those among whom he lives. This counterbalances

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SERM. I. balances many a diſadvantage of outward fortune, and puts into his hand many opportunities of ſatisfaction and comfort. He is likely to poſſeſs many friends and well-wiſhers, and to have few enemies. The more he is known, the more will the favour of thoſe who ſurround him grow; and the proſpect before him of having his *hoary head crowned with honour*.

THUS, in ſeveral inſtances, I have briefly pointed out what may, or may not, be expected from the world, when we look forward to the ordinary courſe of human affairs: Not an uninterrupted enjoyment of all the comforts of proſperity; nor undiſturbed ſatisfaction of our various intercourſes with ſociety; not grateful returns from all whom we have obliged or ſerved: But what we may expect, if we keep a good conſcience and ſtudy to do our duty, is peace of mind; a tolerably eaſy and comfortable ſtate, amidſt the viciſſitudes of life; and the love and eſteem of thoſe with whom we are connected.—*The hope of the righteous ſhall be gladneſs.*

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The present subject has led me to consider only what the righteous man has to hope for in the ordinary course of the world. But I have now to observe, that he has before him a much higher object of hope than any I have mentioned; a hope which arises not from the ordinary course of human affairs, but from an extraordinary interposition of divine grace and mercy, conveyed to us by the gospel; even the *hope which is laid up for him in heaven*; the assured expectation of of a better life, in a higher and better world. Put the case of the servant of God being overwhelmed with all the disappointments which the world can bring upon him, here is an *expectation* which will be always *gladness*; with which he can perpetually solace himself. Through the present state of existence he is no more than a passenger. If he can render it in any degree tolerable and easy to himself, it is well; it is all he expects. His home, his place of rest is in those habitations to which, through the merits of his Redeemer, SERM. I.

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SERM. I. Redeemer, he is taught and encouraged to aspire. He knows that *in due season, he shall reap if he faint not.** That when the *earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*†; for *to them who, patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life.*‡. Hence, whether you consider him in this life, or consider him as looking forward to another, his hope is perpetual *gladness, while the expectations of the wicked shall perish.*

* Galat. vi. 9. † 2 Corinth. v. 1. ‡ Rom. ii. 7.

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SERMON II.

On the proper DISPOSITION of the HEART towards GOD.

ACTS, xvii. 28.

In Him we live, and move, and have our Being.

SERM. II.

THERE is nothing which all nature more loudly proclaims than that ſome Supreme Being has framed and rules this univerſe. *Day uttereth ſpeech of it to day, and night ſheweth knowledge of it to night.* Our birth and our life, our ſenſations and our actions, the objects which we behold, and the pleaſures which we enjoy, all conſpire to teſtify that ſome wonderful intelligence has diſpoſed and arranged, and ſtill ſupports

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SERM. II. ſupports and animates the whole frame of nature. This is what ſcarcely any man of ſober mind ever called in queſtion. It was the dictate of nature to the moſt ſavage and barbarous, as well as to the civilized nations. The American and the Indian in his deſert, as well as the Grecian ſage and the Roman conqueror, adored, each after his own mode, a Sovereign of the Univerſe.—The Pſalmiſt obſerves, that* *the fool hath ſaid in his heart there is no God.* Among the follies, however, with which the human race is chargeable, this is one which, in the courſe of ages, ſeemed to have made the ſmalleſt progreſs. It was reſerved for modern times and evil days, to engender, in one region of the earth, a ſyſtem of philoſophy which ſhould revive the exploded principles of atheiſm, and ſtudy to pour forth their poiſon among the nations, not only to the extinction of religion, but to the ſubverſion of eſtabliſhed governments, and of good order among mankind.

* Pſ. xiv. 1.

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SERM. II.

Diſmiſſing all deluſions of this nature as unworthy the attention of any reaſonable unperverted mind, holding it for certain that nothing can be more real than the exiſtence of a Supreme Divinity, it follows of courſe from this belief, that there are diſpoſitions correſpondent to Him which ought to be found in every human mind, among the young and old, among the high and low, the rich and the poor. It is abſurd to ſuppoſe, that while the relations in which we ſtand to our fellow-creatures, whether as equals, ſuperiours, or inferiours, naturally call forth certain ſentiments and affections, there ſhould be none which properly correſpond to the firſt and greateſt of all Beings; to Him, whom, though we ſee him not, we all recogniſe; to Him, *in whom*, as it is beautifully expreſſed in my text, *we live, and move, and have our being.*

THE proper diſpoſition of mind with reſpect to God, is generally expreſſed by the term of Love to him. This

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SERM. II. This is very juſtly founded on the ſolemn injunction of our bleſſed Lord*, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, and with all thy mind; this is the firſt and great commandment.* Hence, it is common among religious writers to include the whole of pious affections towards God in Love. But when this term is applied to the Almighty, we muſt be careful to underſtand aright what it imports. We all know what it is to love any of our fellow-creatures; but ſuch an affection as we bear to them, cannot in a literal ſenſe be transferred to God. Among them it is ſometimes connected with the fervency of paſſion; it commonly imports ſome degree of fond and intimate attachment; all which it were highly improper in us to affect towards the Supreme Being, *whoſe ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts.* I am afraid that the application of Love in a ſtrict ſenſe, and ſometimes in too fer-

* Matth. xxii. 37.

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vent and paſſionate a ſtrain towards God, has, among ſome ſerious and well diſpoſed minds, given riſe to no little enthuſiaſm in religion. SERM. II.

When therefore we treat of Love as applied to God, it muſt be analyſed or reſolved into thoſe ſentiments which are proper and ſuitable for us to encourage towards the God whom we adore. That love of him which religion requires, and which our Saviour has ſo ſolemnly enjoined, is a compounded affection, and the diſpoſitions which it includes are principally three; reverence, gratitude, ſubmiſſion. Of the nature and foundation of each of theſe I am to treat in the ſequel of this diſcourſe, and ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate them as forming that temper and diſpoſition of mind which we ought always to preſerve towards the Great Author of our exiſtence.

I. The foundation of every proper diſpoſition towards God muſt be laid in Reverence, that is, admiration mixed with awe; what, in its lower degrees among

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SERM. II. among men, is called Reſpect; but carried to its higheſt point with relation to God, may be termed profound veneration. In this diſpoſition towards Him we ought habitually to be found, not only in the exerciſes of immediate devotion, but amidſt the ordinary occurrences of life. Every thing indeed that we ſee around us gives perpetual occaſion for it. We find ourſelves in an immenſe univerſe, where it is impoſſible for us, without aſtoniſhment and awe, to contemplate the glory and the power of Him who hath created it. From the greateſt to the leaſt object that we behold, from the ſtar that glitters in the heavens to the inſect that creeps upon the ground, from the thunder that rolls in the ſkies to the flower that bloſſoms in the fields, all things teſtify a profound and myſterious wiſdom, a mighty and all powerful hand, before which we muſt tremble and adore. Neither the cauſes nor the iſſues of the events which we behold, is it in our power to trace: neither how we came into this world, nor whither we go when

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when we retire from it, are we able of ourſelves to tell; but in the mean-time find ourſelves ſurrounded with aſtoniſhing magnificence on every hand. We walk through the earth as through the apartments of a vaſt palace, which fill every attentive ſpectator with wonder. All the works which our power can erect, all the ornaments which our art can contrive, are feeble and trifling in compariſon with theſe glories which nature every where preſents to our view. The immenſe arch of the heavens, the ſplendor of the ſun in his meridian brightneſs, or the beauty of his riſing and ſetting hours, the rich landſcape of the fields, and the boundleſs expanſe of the ocean, are ſcenes which mock every rival attempt of human ſkill or labour. Nor is it only in the ſplendid appearances of nature, but amidſt its rudeſt forms, that we trace the hand of the Divinity. In the ſolitary deſert, and the high mountain, in the hanging precipice, the roaring torrent, and the aged foreſt, though there be nothing to cheer, there is much

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SERM. II. much to ſtrike the mind with awe, to give riſe to thoſe ſolemn and ſublime ſenſations which elevate the heart to an Almighty, all Creating Power.

In ſhort, we can no where caſt our eyes around us without meeting what is ſufficient to awaken reverence of the Deity. This reverence becomes the more profound that the great Being who is the object of it, is to us inviſible and unknown. We may ſeek to diſcover him, but he hides himſelf from us; his footſteps we clearly trace, but his face we can never behold. *We go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but we cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he worketh, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himſelf on the right hand that we cannot ſee him**. We know that *he is not far from every one of us*; yet he ſhrouds himſelf in the darkneſs of his pavilion; *he anſwereth from the ſecret place of thunder*†. Before this incomprehenſible Being, this God terrible and ſtrong, we become in a manner annihilated; we are ſenſible that

* Job, xxiii. 8. 9. † Pſ. lxxxi. 7.

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in his ſight we are only as the *drop of* SERM. II.
the bucket and the *ſmall duſt in the balance*; and in his preſence can only *rejoice with trembling*. For we know that the mighty arm which upholds the univerſe, and which ſurrounds us with wonders on every ſide, can in a moment cruſh us to the duſt, if we become objects of diſpleaſure to heaven. Awful are the operations of the Divine Power which we are conſtantly beholding in the moral as well as in the natural world. The Almighty rules among the nations, as well as over individuals: on his pleaſure depend all the great revolutions of the earth; the interpoſitions of his Providence are frequently apparent to the world, in bringing down the mighty, and raiſing up the fallen. In the books of the law and the prophets, we hear his threatenings againſt rebellious ſinners denounced with a tremendous voice; and in the diſpenſation of the goſpel, a moſt ſtriking inſtance is exhibited to us of the ſtrict juſtice of his government, in the expiation that was required for the apoſtacy of a guilty world.—

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SERM. II

So that both the law and the goſpel, the works of nature and the conduct of Providence, unite in uttering that ſolemn voice which ought often to reſound in our ears: *Be ſtill, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth.— Fear before him, all ye nations: Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. For honour and majeſty are before him; ſtrength and beauty are in his ſanctuary. He alone doth great things and unſearchable; marvellous things without number**.

On this head of diſcourſe I have inſiſted the more, becauſe I apprehend that ſuch ſentiments as I have now been inculcating occur too rarely among many profeſſed Chriſtians. Did an awful reverence for the Supreme being dwell on all our minds with a properly impreſſive ſenſe, its effects would oftener appear in conduct. On many occaſions it would check a wanton levity of ſpirits. It would infuſe more ſolemnity into our religious acts. It would inſpire

* Pſ. xlvi. 10. Pſ. xcvi. 6—8. Job, v. 9,

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inſpire greater reſpect for the temples of God, and for all the forms of ſacred worſhip. It would baniſh that profanation of the name of God which we ſo often hear from unhallowed lips.— Let it be remembered that the *fear of God* is, throughout much of the ſcripture, employed as the term deſcriptive of the whole of religion. It is not the fear which ſlaves are conſtrained to feel for a tyrant, but the reverence which children have for the beſt parent, or ſubjects for the beſt ſovereign; the veneration which neceſſarily enters into the love we bear to a Being of ſuperiour order: it is to *fear the Lord and his goodneſs*, as it is emphatically expreſſed by one of the prophets*. This fear of God, therefore, is not only conſiſtent with the love of him, but forms a material part of it. The pretended love of God diſjoined from reverence of him, would no longer be genuine love, but would riſe into arrogant preſumption. I proceed to obſerve, SERM. II.

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* Hoſea iii. 5.

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SERM. II. II. That gratitude forms an essential part of that disposition which we ought to bear towards God. This implies an affectionate sense of God upon the mind, and enters directly into love, understood in its most common acceptation. It were a gross mistake to imagine that the reverence of which I have discoursed has any tendency to check gratitude: on the contrary it heightens it, by uniting the sense of our benefactor's condescension with the benefits which he conveys. The more eminent the qualities of a benefactor are, and the higher the rank is in which he stands, our hearts are warmed the more by the feeling of his goodness.

It is impossible to think of God at all, without conceiving him as the benefactor of mankind. Mysterious as this world is in many of its appearances, it nevertheless carries, on the whole, a strongly marked character of goodness and benignity in its author. We behold a vast system obviously contrived to provide, not food and nourishment only, but comfort also and enjoyment to

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to an infinite number of inhabitants. The more that philoſophy has enlarged our views of nature, the more it has been diſcovered that, throughout the wide extent of creation, there is no uſeleſs profuſion of magnificence, but that every thing has been rendered ſubſervient to the welfare of the rational or ſenſible world; nay, that many objects, which were once conſidered as not only ſuperfluous but noxious, hold an uſeful place in the general ſyſtem. Such proviſion has been made for our entertainment on this earth, ſuch care has been taken to ſtore the world with a variety of pleaſures to cheer our ſenſes and enliven our imagination, that he whoſe eye opens on all the beauty of nature, muſt be of inſenſible heart indeed if he feels no gratitude to that Being who has brought him forth to enjoy this wonderful ſcene. SERM. II.

But the gratitude of a good man will naturally go farther than this. He will think not only of the benefits which he enjoys in common with the reſt of his fellow-creatures, but of thoſe which are

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SERM. II. are appropriated particularly to himſelf. Who is there amongſt us, my brethren, but in fairly reviewing the events of his life from infancy to this day, in thinking of the comforts he enjoys, and recollecting the dangers from which he has been delivered; who is there, I ſay, that has not cauſe to acknowledge an inviſible guardian, who has all along watched over his frail eſtate, has protected and bleſſed him? Perhaps of the bleſſings which you enjoy, or the deliverances you have received, you are more diſpoſed to trace ſome human cauſe; one favourable diſtinction you aſcribe to your birth, your parents, or your education; for ſome other happy circumſtance you think yourſelf ſolely indebted to the kindneſs of an earthly friend, or you refer it to the exertions of your own dexterity and talents.—Thoughtleſs and inconſiderate man! Have you forgotten that there is a firſt Cauſe of all, a Supreme Lord, who from the beginning, has arranged and prepared the whole ſeries of cauſes and effects, of whoſe deſtination and agency

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cy men are no more than the ſecondary inſtruments? To what but the original plan of his goodneſs, do you owe the favourable circumſtances of your birth or your education, the kindneſs which he ordained to ſpring up in the breaſt of your friend, or the talents and abilities which he implanted within you, in order to favour your ſucceſs? SERM. II.

But an exhortation to gratitude you perhaps conſider as coming unſeaſonably in your preſent ſituation. The time was, when the light of the divine countenance ſhone upon you, and looking up to a Benefactor in heaven, with a grateful heart you acknowledged your bleſſings to be derived from Him; but that time is now paſt; you are left deſolate and forſaken, bereaved of the chief comforts on which you had ſet your hearts. And, becauſe many of the favours of heaven are paſt, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Are there not ſtill ſome others remaining for which you have reaſon to give thanks? Have you forgotten all the bleſſings you have continued

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SERM. II. tinued to enjoy ever since the day that you came forth a helpless infant into the world? Be assured that a gratitude of that sort, which dies away as soon as it ceases to be fed by the usual stream of benefits, which has regard to present favours only, and none to those that are past, is not true gratitude, but the symptom of a selfish and mercenary spirit. If you be disposed to thank God only when he is giving you all the desires of your hearts, what praise have ye? Do not publicans and sinners the same? men who have little either of religion or sensibility of heart. But when Providence shrouds itself in a dark cloud, and some of your favourite enjoyments are carried away, if still, with calm and patient mind, you continue to bless the name of the Lord, and still retain a thankful sense of the blessings you have so long, and so far beyond your deserts, been permitted to enjoy; this is to be truly grateful; this is to shew yourselves the dutiful children of a Father in Heaven.

In reviewing the grounds which we have for gratitude to God, it becomes

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us to attend, not only to those blessings which appertain individually to each of us, but to those also which we enjoy in common with others of our brethren. How much reason have we, for instance, to bless God for having cast our lot in a land where we enjoy all the advantages of mild and equal government, and all the comforts of tranquillity and peace, while many a nation around us is oppressed by the hand of tyrannical power, disturbed with the alarms and terrors of war, or suffering from the ravages of the hostile spoiler? What higher reason still to be grateful for having our lot cast where the joyful sound of the gospel is heard, where the glad tidings *of peace upon earth and good will to the sons of men* are announced to us by the Son of God, who came to bring pardon and salvation to a guilty world? What everlasting ground of thankfulness is afforded by the blessed hope that is given us of life immortal; of *a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens, when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved; of an inheritance*

SERM. II.

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SERM. II. *inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, aſcertained to all good men by the death and the reſurrection of our bleſſed Redeemer! *Bleſs the Lord, O my ſoul! and all that is within me, bleſs his holy name, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diſeaſes; who redeemeth thy life from deſtruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindneſs and tender mercies**. Let us now add,

III. ENTIRE and profound ſubmiſſion as a diſpoſition moſt neceſſary to be preſerved on our part towards God. This includes ſubmiſſion of the underſtanding to the diſcoveries which God has been pleaſed to make; ſubmiſſion of the inclinations to the laws which he has promulgated for our conduct; ſubmiſſion of the will to the diſpenſations of his Providence, as they affect the events of our life. It is not ſubmiſſion conſtrained merely by a power againſt

* Pſ. ci. 1, 2, 3.

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againſt which we know that it is in vain to ſtruggle; it is ſubmiſſion ariſing from reverence compounded with gratitude; ſubmiſſion to One whoſe ſupreme perfection entitles Him to abſolute obedience, whoſe experienced goodneſs affords ground for implicit truſt. SERM. II.

In the preſent imperfect ſtate of human nature, there will be often found no ſmall reluctance to that entire reſignation to God which religion requires. The pride of human underſtanding will ſometimes revolt againſt the diſcoveries which God has made in his word, as deficient and unſatisfactory; the ſtruggles of paſſion will frequently riſe againſt the reſtraints impoſed on us by his laws, and the ſeverities inflicted by his Providence. But in the heart of a pious man all ſuch oppoſition is checked and borne down, by a ſteady faith that, under the adminiſtration of the Almighty, all is ordered for the beſt, though for ſeveral ſteps of that high adminiſtration we are unable at preſent to account. Hence that calm tranquillity he preſerves, and that reſolute and

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SERM. II. and magnanimous ſubmiſſion he maintains, amidſt the moſt unpromiſing circumſtances. He knows that in this ſtupendous univerſe there muſt be many things that lie beyond our comprehenſion. As yet thou ſeeſt no more than the riſe of the divine government, the beginnings of a great plan which is not to be completed until the courſe of ages ſhall end. Meanwhile darkneſs muſt be allowed, for wiſe reaſons, to remain upon many things; ſevere reſtraints muſt be impoſed on conduct, and occaſional ſufferings muſt be endured.—If thou ſuffereſt, ſigh, and be ſilent: wait, and be patient. Preſume not to exalt thy weak reaſon againſt the revelations of heaven, nor to give vent to thy impatient complaints againſt the ordinations of thy Supreme Governour.—Think with awe, and ſpeak with caution, of what is ſo much above thee. Wait till thy being ſhall be unfolded; till it ſhall have paſſed through the neceſſary ſteps that ſhall gradually prepare thee for beholding the ſecrets of the univerſe; for underſtanding the counſels

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sels of the God who made it. In the mean time, be content to submit and to adore. Let no other voice be heard from thee but this; "Thou hast made "me, O God! and I am thine, for "*in thee I live, and move, and have my* "*being*. Wherever thou commandest "me to go, I follow. Whatever thou "appointest me to suffer, I bear with- "out murmur. It is my part to per- "severe in my duty; all the rest I "leave to Thee; to Thee, whose wis- "dom I revere, whose goodness I have "so often experienced; in whom there- "fore I repose implicit trust that all "shall end well, and the righteous be "made finally happy."—*Good is the word which the Lord hath spoken. Not my will, but His be done. Behold here I am. Let him do to his servant as seemeth good to him**. SERM. II.

Such are the principal dispositions which it becomes us to preserve towards God; to preserve towards Him at all times; not in the solemn hours of devotion only, but when we act in the busy

* 2 Kings, xx. 19. Luke, xxii. 4. 2 Sam. xv. 26.

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SERM. II. buſy world, or when we walk in retirement amidſt the ſcenes of nature. If this union of reverence, gratitude, and ſubmiſſion, habitually poſſeſs our minds, they will of courſe ſhoot forth into what is termed *delighting ourſelves in God*; thinking of him with peculiar complacency and warmth of affection; and elevating us ſometimes into a ſacred tranſport when we draw nigh to him in acts of immediate worſhip, in prayer and praiſe. Then is the ſeaſon when the fulneſs of the ſoul gives riſe to thoſe ſublime and pathetic effuſions of piety which are recorded of ſaints in former times: *My ſoul thirſteth for God; for the living God: when ſhall I come and appear before him? I will lift up my hands in thy name; my ſoul ſhall be ſatisfied as with marrow and with fatneſs, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Bleſſed is the man whom thou chooſeſt, and cauſeſt to approach unto thee.— O that I knew where to find him, that I might come even to his ſeat*!* When

*Pſ. xlii. 2. Pſ. lxiii. 5, 6. Pſ. lxv. 4. Job, xxiii. 3.

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When such sentiments as these, of ardent affection towards God, chastened by reverence and submission, as well as warmed by gratitude, predominate in our hearts, and when they exert their proper influence in purifying and regulating our life, we may then be truly said to *love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.* SERM. II.

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SERMON III.

On the Moral Character of Chriſt.

ACTS, x. 30.

Jeſus of Nazareth—who went about doing good.

SERM. THERE are two great aſpects under which we may contemplate the appearance of our bleſſed Lord on the earth. One is, his coming into the world in order to make expiation to divine juſtice by his ſufferings and death for the guilt of the human race.—The other, is, his coming to act as the enlightener and reformer of the world, by his doctrine and his life. The firſt of thoſe views is the moſt ſublime; as on

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on the atonement which he made for us, depend all our hopes of the pardon of sin, and of life eternal. In the other view, it is also of high importance that all christians should frequently consider him, in order to the proper regulation of their conduct: the observation of his example is no less necessary for this purpose, than attention to his doctrine; as by his doctrine he taught us what we are bound to do, so in his example he showed us what we ought to be. SERM. III.

Hence the example of our Blessed Lord has been ever held up by serious writers to christians for their instruction and imitation. It obviously possesses many advantages above any other standard of conduct. It carries peculiar obligations from gratitude, interest, and duty, to enforce the imitation of it; and it is the only example, in following which, we are certain never to err. It has also another peculiar advantage attending it, which is not so commonly thought of; that is, the universality of its use. It evidently appears that

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SERM. III. our Lord himself had this benefit to his followers in view from the train of living which he chose to adopt. Had he pitched upon any one station of life, the influence of his example would have been much more limited. The integrity, for instance, of Samuel as a judge, the devotion of David on the throne, the fortitude of Daniel in the midst of a corrupt court, hold forth indeed splendid instances of virtue, but they hold them out only to a few: whereas when Christ appeared on earth, he confined himself to one state of fortune or line of life; he did not addict himself to any particular calling; he did not even fix his residence in one place, but he gives us opportunity of viewing him in different places and situations, in all that variety of lights which indiscriminately regard the bulk of mankind: his life was divided between the contemplative and the active; devotion and business equally shared it. We behold him in private life among his disciples, like a father in the midst of his family. We behold him in public life, acting with authority

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authority in the diſcharge of his high commiſſion, aſſuming the dignity which belonged to his office, and boldly reproving the great and the powerful. We ſee him ſometimes in poverty and obſcurity, contemned and perſecuted. We ſee him at other times elevated into public favour, followed by applauding crowds, and entering Jeruſalem in triumph. We can challenge all hiſtory ſacred or profane, to ſhew us any eminent perſonage, ſaint, philoſopher, or hero, whoſe character was ſo thoroughly tried, and ſo fully exhibited to admiration, as that of our Saviour. What adds greatly to the luſtre of his example, it was marked by no affected ſingularities nor peculiar auſterities. He did not ſeclude himſelf from ordinary ſociety, but converſed among men with that ſort of modeſt piety and virtue which ſuits itſelf to the level of human infirmity, and is conſpicuous for the diſcharge of the plain and ſubſtantial duties of a good life. SERM. III.

It is not my intention at preſent to attempt a full ſurvey of all the graces

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SERM. III. and virtues which distinguished our Lord's life, and enobled his sufferings and death; as this would lead into a field too extensive for one discourse: I mean to confine myself to the manner in which he fulfilled the social duties, and exercised his benevolence as a man among men. This will afford an instructive view of what may be termed the moral character of Christ in his ordinary intercourse with the world, and will point out a proper model of our behaviour towards one another. The most studied and laboured encomiums never drew a more amiable character than what is contained in the few and plain words of the text; *Jesus of Nazareth went about doing good.* Let us consider in what manner He fulfilled this character.

I. We are to attend to his assiduity and alacrity in seeking out and embracing every opportunity of doing good: this is the most substantial part of the great virtue of charity. There is a sort of negative goodness with which most men are ready to be satisfied;

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fied; they applaud themselves if they have kept their hands free from unjust deeds, and no man can reproach them for working mischief to their neigbour; but with respect to his welfare they are totally indifferent. They remain in a sort of torpid apathy about the concerns of others, without either rejoicing in their prosperity, or being affected with their distresses: this is far below what is required of a good man. We are all designed by our Creator to be parts of one body, members of one great society, where every one was to contribute his part towards the common benefit, and to be made happy by studying to make others so. In proportion indeed as our ability and influence extend, the obligation to be extensively beneficial also grows; but hardly is there any sphere so narrow and circumscribed, as not to afford some opportunities of being useful.—In thy humble and obscure station, thou art apt to think thyself entirely insignificant and lost to the world. To thee, indeed, it may not belong to heal the diseased, to raise SERM. III.

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the

SERM. III. the fallen, to ſupply the indigent, or to bring forward the deſerving. But is there none whoſe ſpirit thou canſt cheer, or whoſe infirmities thou canſt help to lighten? Haſt thou no parent, no child, no brother, no friend, to whom thou canſt ſpeak the words of comfort in the hour of ſorrow, whoſe miſtakes thou canſt rectify, or whoſe erring ſteps thou canſt turn into the right path?

Here let the example of Chriſt, as far as thy ſphere admits it, be before thine eyes to quicken thine activity and animate thy zeal. The whole hiſtory of his life is the hiſtory of active and diffuſive benignity. Wherever he was preſent, we find him employed in doing good; either relieving men from their diſtreſſes, or making them wiſe and happy by his inſtructions. The whole country around him ſeemed to be his family, and if in a literal ſenſe he had been the father of them all, they could not have exerciſed his care, or ſhared his bounty more. The hungry were fed, and the ſick were cured, the

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the blind saw, and the lame walked, wherever he came. His miracles never were mere ostentations of power, but always expressions of goodness. Often he prevented the supplications of the distressed and, unasked, conferred his favours; but never did any person apply to him for aid and relief without receiving it, whether he was Jew or Heathen, friend or foe. What is especially remarkable in his beneficence is, that it was continued and persevering in the midst of ingratitude. This is one of the hardest trials of virtue, not to be soured by the perversity of men, and which persons even of generous spirits find it the most difficult to bear. But though Christ had to deal with a most untoward and stubborn generation, whom no evidence could convince, and no goodness could mollify; though of all the great numbers, who had been objects of his beneficence, we read of few who thankfully acknowledged his kindness, fewer who became his followers, and none who rose up to assert his cause when borne down by unjust persecution; yet, SERM. III.

seeking

SERM. III. seeking to do good only for its own sake, he perſevered to the laſt in unwearied beneficence. He *overcame evil with good*: it had been his principle, and, it would appear, a noted ſaying of his, which his diſciples remembered and quoted after his death; *it is more bleſſed to give than to receive**.

II. We ought to propoſe for imitation that humanity of manners, that gentleneſs and affability which appeared in the whole of our Lord's behaviour. This relates to the manner of conferring benefits, which is often as material as the benefits themſelves are. Theſe are ſometimes conferred ſo ungraciouſly, as to carry the air of inſults rather than benefits, whereas, when they bear the marks of proceeding from real kindneſs, their value is heightened, and they are received with double pleaſure. There are numberleſs occaſions, when the diſcovery of a humane temper, and the leſſer offices of obliging and courteous behaviour, con-

* Acts, xx. 35.

tribute

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tribute eſſentially to the happineſs of others, and ſupply the place of greater benefits, which it may not be in our power to beſtow.—For this amiable ſpirit our Lord was remarkably diſtinguiſhed. He was open and affable to all, and eaſier of acceſs than his own diſciples. On different occaſions we find him checking his diſciples, when they reſtrained the forwardneſs of the multitude who preſſed upon him, ſeeking relief. Nay, he rebuked them for forbiding little children to come to him, whom the fondneſs of the parents ſought to introduce to his preſence. He took the children into his arms and bleſſed them, and propounded them to his diſciples as emblems of that innocence and ſimplicity which are requiſite for our entering into the kingdom of heaven*.—He converſed familiarly with all ſorts of people, and readily anſwered the queſtions they put to him. He had nothing of that haughty and diſtant reſerve which we ſo often

SERM. III.

* Mark, x. 14.

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SERM. III.

ſee maintained by men of the world, and which prevents them from holding intercourſe with any whom they conſider as their inferiors either in reputation or in rank. On the contrary, as our Lord was ready to do good to all, ſo he diſdained not to receive kindneſs from others; complying cheerfully with the deſire of thoſe who invited him to their houſes, and accepting in good part the proffered tokens of their well-intended reſpect. For ſuch inſtances of courteſy he was reproached by the Jews as one who wanted that external ſeverity of manners which they imagined belonged to a profeſſed reformer of the world. But He, who knew what was in the heart of man, ſaw that gentleneſs and condeſcenſion were more effectual methods of gaining men over to goodneſs, than harſhneſs and auſterity; and therefore did not decline all converſation with men of doubtful or blemiſhed lives, as long as there was any hope of making them better. It was indeed true that he was, as they reproached him, *a friend to publicans and*

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and sinners; for he was a friend to every one to whom he could do good. —At the same time, it is of importance to remark, that this benignity of our Lord's manners never betrayed him into the opposite extreme, never degenerated into that easiness of good nature, which too often leads men to slide into the manners and habits of those with whom they converse, though they cannot approve of them. Wherever the interests of virtue were concerned, our Saviour was inflexibly firm. He boldly lifted up his voice, and testified against vice and corruption wherever he beheld them. He freely reproved the greatest men of the nation for their hypocritical and assumed shews of sanctity; and the civility with which he was entertained in the house of a Pharisee, did not prevent him from inveighing severely against the vices of that sect in their own presence*.

SERM. III.

III. We are to consider our Lord in the light of a faithful and affectionate

* Luke, xi. 37.

and

SERM. III.

friend, and his example as the pattern of all the offices that belong to virtuous friendſhip. The Apoſtles whom he choſe for his intimate companions and friends, were men of honeſt and candid minds, and of great plainneſs and ſimplicity of character; men who, from real eſteem, and from conviction of the truth of his miſſion, had become his followers, and who, notwithſtanding the diſadvantages of his fortune in the world, continued to follow him to the laſt. At the ſame time, together with thoſe eſſential Principles of worth, they had alſo great defects. They were moſt of them of timid and fearful diſpoſition, of ſlow underſtanding, backward to apprehend ſpiritual things, and ſtill prepoſſeſſed with the favourite prejudice of their nation, that the promiſed Meſſiah was to be a great conqueror, who was to reſcue their country from foreign ſubjection, and raiſe it to empire and grandeur. Among theſe men our Lord paſſed all the hours of his private life, acting every part of an affectionate and faithful friend, commending, adviſing, and reproving

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proving with great sincerity, and at the same time with great tenderness. In his manner of living he put himself perfectly on a level with them. Some of them he honoured with greater intimacy than others; but like a prudent father in his family, he allowed none of them to affect superiority over the rest, and checked all that tended to rivalry among them. He never flattered them in their failings. He never soothed them with vain hopes. He never concealed the disagreeable consequences that would follow from adherence to his cause. Again and again he inculcated what they were backward and unwilling to believe concerning himself; and though the questions they put often discovered a degree of gross ignorance he answered them all without passion or impatience, training them up by degrees to the events that were to happen after his decease, and to the high part they were destined then to act in the world. SERM. III.

How happy would it be for mankind if more attention were given to this

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SERM. III. this noble pattern of fidelity and complacency which ought to prevail among friends, and of the indulgence due to the failings of those who are, in their general character, worthy and estimable persons! This amiable indulgence he carried so far, that in one of the most critical seasons of his life, during his agony in the garden, when he had left his disciples for a short time, with a strict charge to watch till he should return, but upon his returning found them all asleep, all the reproof which their negligence at so important a juncture drew from him, was no more than this, *What, could ye not watch with me for one hour**?—Of the tenderness of our Lord's affections, and the constancy of his friendship, we have a very memorable instance, in that mixture of friendship and filial piety which he discovered during the cruelty of his last sufferings. It is recorded that when he hung upon the cross, beholding John his beloved disciple, and Mary his mother, standing as spectators below, he said to John,

* Matth. xxvi. 40.

Behold

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Behold thy mother; and to Mary, *Behold thy son*; thus, committing his forlorn mother to the charge of his friend John, as the most sacred and honourable pledge he could leave him of their antient friendship. The heart of his friend melted; and from that hour, we are told, *he took her home with him to his own house.* It is John himself who has recorded to us this honourable testimony of his master's friendship*. SERM. III.

IV. The example of Christ holds forth for our imitation his steady command of temper amidst the highest provocations, and his ready forgiveness of injuries. Though he had revenge always in his power, he constantly declined it. On one occasion when his disciples wished him to call down fire from heaven to punish the inhospitality of the Samaritans, *he turned and rebuked them, saying, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them*†. When he was *reviled, he reviled*

* John, xix. 26. 27. † Luke, ix. 55.

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SERM. III. *reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.* The insults, which he often received from a brutal multitude, had no power to alter the meekness and generosity of his disposition; he continued to beseech and intreat them, when they sought to chase him away from amongst them. When they accused him of being in confederacy with evil spirits, he answered their injurious defamation only with mild and calm reasoning, that if he by means *of Satan did cast out Satan, his kingdom must be divided against itself, and could not stand.* At his trial before the High Priest, when he was most injuriously treated, and contrary to all law was, in face of the court, struck by one of the High Priest's officers, what could be spoken more meekly and reasonably than his return to this usage, at a time when all circumstances concurred to exasperate the spirit of an innocent man; *if I have spoken evil; bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me**?—When

* John, xviii. 27.

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his enemies were completing the last scene of their cruelty in putting him to death, all their barbarous usage and scurrilous taunts on that occasion provoked not one revengeful thought in his breast, nor drew from his lips one misbecoming expression; but, on the contrary, the last accents of his expiring breath went forth in that affectionate prayer for their forgiveness; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*—Shall we, my friends, who have before our eyes such an example of generous magnanimity, of continued self-command amidst the most trying situations, not be ashamed of giving vent to passion on every trifling provocation, and fiercely demanding reparation for the smallest injury; we, who, from the remembrance of our own failings, have so many motives for mutual forbearance and forgiveness; while He, on the other hand, had done no wrong, had never given offence to any, but had the justest title to expect friendship from every human being? SERM. III.

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SERM. III.

V. LET us attend to the ſympathy and compaſſion which our Lord diſcovered for the ſufferings of mankind. It was not with a cold unfeeling diſpoſition that he performed the office of relieving the diſtreſſed. His manner of beſtowing relief clearly ſhowed with what ſenſibility he entered into the ſorrows of others. How affecting, for inſtance, is the account of his reſtoring to life the ſon of the widow of Nain, as it is related in the beautiful ſimplicity of the evangelical hiſtorian? *When he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only ſon of his mother; and ſhe was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.* All the circumſtances in this incident are moving and affecting; and it preſently appeared with what tender ſenſibility our Lord was touched at the ſight of ſo mournful a proceſſion. *And when the Lord ſaw her, he had compaſſion on her, and ſaid unto her, Weep not; and he came and touched the bier, (and they that bare him ſtood ſtill,) and he ſaid, Young man, I ſay unto thee ariſe. And he*

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*he that was dead, ſat up and began to ſpeak; and he delivered him to his mother**. SERM. III.

The whole ſcene of raiſing Lazarus from the grave, places our Saviour's ſympathy in the ſtrongeſt light. As ſoon as he came among the mourning friends, although he knew the cauſe of their mourning was ſpeedily to be removed, he could not forbear partaking of their ſorrow; *He groaned and was troubled in ſpirit*; and when ſurrounded by a crowd in tears, he approached to to the grave of his deceaſed friend, it is expreſsly recorded to the eternal honour of his feelings, *Jeſus wept; and the Jews ſaid, Behold how he loved him*†! In like manner, when, for the laſt time, he was about to enter into Jeruſalem, though the certain knowledge of all the cruelties which were prepared for him there, would have filled the breaſt of any ordinary perſon with indignation and hatred, inſtead of ſuch emotions, the fore-

* Luke, vii. 12—16. † John, xi. 35.

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SERM. III. sight of the direful calamities which hung over that devoted city melted his heart; and when he drew near to it and beheld it, *he wept*; pouring forth that pathetic lamentation; *O Jeruſalem, Jeruſalem, thou that killeſt the Prophets and ſtoneſt them that are ſent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! If thou hadſt known, at leaſt in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes*!* Thus, as a man, he indulged all the amiable feelings of our nature, teaching us that it is our duty to regulate our paſſions, not to extirpate them.

Such was Jeſus of Nazareth, the founder of our religion. A part only of his character I have now attempted to delineate: many other of his eminent graces and virtues have been left in the

* Luke, xiii. 34. Luke, xix. 42.

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the ſhade. But in what we have now contemplated of his behaviour as a man among men, we behold a perfect model of the conduct we ought to hold in the ordinary intercourſe of ſociety with one another. We have ſeen him attentive to every opportunity of being beneficent and uſeful; in his behaviour to all men, affable and obliging; to his friends, faithful and indulgent; to his enemies, generous and forgiving; to the diſtreſſed, full of tenderneſs and compaſſion. I might alſo have dwelt upon the peaceable ſpirit he diſplayed on all occaſions; his reſpect, as a ſubject, to the civil laws and government of his country; diſcouraging a factious and mutinous ſpirit; paying tribute when demanded; exhorting his followers to render unto Ceſar the things which are Ceſar's, as unto God thoſe which are God's. Enough has been ſaid to ſhew what a bleſſing it would prove to the world, if this illuſtrious example were generally followed. Men would then become happy in all their

SERM. III.

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SERM. III. their connexions with one another.—This world would be a bleſſed dwelling; and the ſociety of human beings on earth, would approach to the joy and peace of the ſocieties of the juſt in heaven.

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SERMON IV.

On the Wounds of the Heart.

PROVERBS, xviii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

THERE are are two classes of goods and evils belonging to man; those which respect his corporeal, and those which respect his spiritual state.—Whatever is of an external nature, is sufficiently the object of attention to all men. In the health and vigour of the body, and in the flourishing state of worldly fortune, all rejoice; and whatever diminishes the one or the other, is immediately felt and lamented. These are

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SERM. IV. are visible and striking objects, on which our senses and imagination are accustomed to dwell. But to procure an equal attention to what is inward and spiritual, is much more difficult. It is not easy to convince men that the soul hath interests of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and is liable to diseases and wounds as real as any which the body suffers, and often much more grievous. What passes within the hearts of men, is always invisible to the public eye. If it be of the pleasing and satisfactory kind, they have no occasion to disclose it; and if it be of a painful nature, it is often their intent to conceal it. In the mean time, *the heart knoweth its own bitterness*; and from its being secreted from public observation, and concentrated within the breast, it is felt the more deeply.—*The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*; the natural vigour and courage of his mind may enable him to surmount the ordinary distresses of life; to bear with patience poverty, sickness, or pain, as long as he is conscious that all

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all is right and ſound within. But if within him, the diſeaſe rankles in his mind and his heart; if that which ſhould ſuſtain him ſerves only to gall and torment him; to what quarter can he then look for relief, or to what medicine apply, when that which ſhould have cured his other wounds is itſelf diſeaſed and wounded? *A wounded ſpirit who can bear?* SERM. IV.

THE ſpirit or ſoul of man is wounded chiefly by three cauſes; by Folly, by Paſſion, by Guilt.

I. IT is wounded by Folly, that is, by vain, light, and improper purſuits; by a conduct, which though it ſhould not be immediately criminal, yet is unſuitable to one's age, character, or condition in the world. Good ſenſe is no leſs requiſite in our religious and moral behaviour, than it is in our worldly affairs. Whoever departs far from the plain track of ſober and reaſonable conduct, ſhall, ſooner or later, undergo the conſequences of a diſeaſed and wounded ſpirit. It often happens, that under the notion of innocent plea-

ſure

SERM. IV. sure and amusement, of only following their humour and indulging their taste, while, as they say, they hurt no man, and violate no material duty, many go on, for a time, in a course of the most egregious follies, and all along conceive themselves to be, if not very virtuous, at least very inoffensive men. The case is the same with the diseases of the mind, as with the diseases of the body. They lurk for a time unperceived.—The seeds of them may be working within, while the person affected imagines himself to be in perfect health: but at length a crisis comes, which brings the secret venom forth, and makes all its malignity be felt.

In this age of dissipation and luxury in which we live, how many avenues are constantly open that lead to the Temple of Folly? To how many temptations are all, but especially the young and the gay, exposed, to squander their whole time amidst the circles of levity, and haunts of pleasure? By idleness and extravagance, and the vain ambition of emulating others in the splendid show of life, multitudes run in-

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to expence beyond their fortune. The time which ſhould be employed in training them for future ſignificance in the world, they loſe in frivolous amuſements and purſuits; or, in the midſt of theſe, bury the fruits of any good education they had already received. Idle aſſociates are ever at hand to aid them in inventing new plans of deſtroying the time. If that fatal engine of miſchief, the gaming table, then attracts and enſnares them, their career of folly will ſoon be completed; the gulph of deſtruction opens, and ruin is at hand. SERM. IV.

Suppoſing ſome incident to befal, as befal at ſome time it muſt, which ſhall awaken perſons of this deſcription from their dreams of vanity; which ſhall open their eyes to the time that they have miſpent, and the follies which they have committed; then, alas! what mortifying and diſquieting views of themſelves will ariſe? How many galling remembrances will crowd upon their minds? They ſee their youth thrown away in diſhonourable or trivial purſuits; thoſe valuable opportunities which

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SERM. IV. which they once enjoyed, of coming forward with distinction in the world, now irretrievably lost; their characters tarnished and sunk in the public eye; and the fortune, perhaps, which they had inherited from their ancestors, wasted among idle companions. They behold around them the countenances of their friends, angry and displeased. To the grave and the respectable, they dare not look up. They, with whom they once started in the race of life as their equals, have now got far before them; they are obliged to respect them as their superiours, and with shame to view themselves left behind, disgraced and dishonoured.—Can any situation be more humbling and mortifying than this? Is not this to suffer in a high degree the misery of a wounded spirit, when a man sees that by mere thoughtlessness and folly, he has exposed and degraded himself; beholds his character, his health, his interest sinking in the world; and is sensible that with his own hands, and by his own blind and ill-judged conduct, he has brought this ruin on himself?—Conscience now begins

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gins to exert its authority, and lift its scourge. At every stroke it inflicts, the wounds of the heart open and bleed: and though it exercise not the same dread severity as when it upbraids us with notorious crimes, yet still it is the voice of God within, rebuking and punishing reasonable creatures for folly as well as for guilt; nor indeed are follies of such a kind as have been described, ever free from many stains of guilt. SERM. IV.

II. If by Folly the spirit is thus liable to be wounded, it is exposed by Passion to wounds still more severe.—Passions are those strong emotions of the mind which impel it to desire, and to act with vehemence. When directed towards proper objects, and kept within just bounds, they possess an useful place in our frame; they add vigour and energy to the mind, and enable it, on great occasions, to act with uncommon force and success; but they always require the government and restraint of reason. It is in the mind, just as it is in the body. Every member of

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SERM. IV. of the body is useful, and serves some good purpose. But if any one swell to an enormous size, it presently becomes a disease. Thus, when a man's passions go on in a calm and moderate train, and no object has taken an inordinate hold of any of them, his spirit is in this part sound, and his life proceeds with tranquillity. But if any of them have been so far indulged, and left without restraint, as to run into excess, a dangerous blow will then be given to the heart. Supposing, for instance, that some passion, even of the nature of those which are reckoned innocent, shall so far seize a man as to conquer and overpower him, his tranquillity will be destroyed. The balance of his soul is lost; he is no longer his own master, nor is capable of attending properly to the offices of life which are incumbent on him, or of turning his thoughts into any other direction than what passion points out. He may be sensible of the wound. He feels the dart that is fixed in his breast, but is unable to extract it.

But

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But the case becomes infinitely worse, if the passion which has seized a man be of the vicious and malignant kind. Let him be placed in the most prosperous situation of life; give him external ease and affluence to the full; and let his character be high, and applauded by the world: yet, if into the heart of this man there has stolen some dark jealous suspicion, some rankling envy, some pining discontent, that instant his temper is soured, and poison is scattered over all his joys. He dwells in secret upon his vexations and cares, and while the crowd admires his prosperity, he envies the more peaceful condition of the peasant and the hind. If his passions chance to be of the more fierce and outrageous nature, the painful feelings they produce will be still more intense and acute. By violent passions the heart is not only wounded, but torn and rent. As long as a man is under the workings of raging ambition, disappointed pride, and keen thirst for revenge, he remains under immediate torment. Over his dark and scowling mind, gloomy ideas continually brood. His SERM. IV.

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SERM. IV. His tranſient fits of merriment and joy are like beams of light breaking, occaſionally from the black cloud that carries the thunder. What greatly aggravates the miſery of ſuch perſons is, that they dare make no complaints.—When the body is diſeaſed or wounded, to our friends we naturally fly and from their ſympathy or aſſiſtance expect relief. But the wounds given to the heart by ill-governed paſſions, are of an opprobrious nature, and muſt be ſtifled in ſecret. The ſlave of paſſion can unboſom himſelf to no friend; and, inſtead of ſympathy, dreads meeting with ridicule or contempt. How intolerably wretched muſt the condition of Haman have been, when, before all his aſſembled friends, he was reduced to make this humbling confeſſion of his ſtate; that, in the height of royal favour, and in the midſt of the utmoſt magnificence and grandeur, "all availed him nothing, ſo long as he ſaw his rival, Mordecai the Jew, ſitting at the King's gate!"

III. The

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SERM. IV.

III. The wounds which the heart receives from guilt, are productive of ſtill greater pain and miſery, than any which have been already mentioned. If beyond being miſled by folly, or overcome by paſſion, a man be conſcious to himſelf of having deliberately committed deeds of injuſtice or cruelty; of having, perhaps, by wicked arts, ſeduced the innocent and unwary, to fall the miſerable victims of his licentious pleaſures; of having ruined, by his diſhoneſty, the unſuſpicious truſting friend; of having amaſſed wealth to himſelf, by fraud and oppreſſion, from the ſpoils of the induſtrious: in ſuch and ſimilar caſes, deep and laſting is the ſting which is ſent into the heart.

I am aware of the arts which have been deviſed by criminal men to ſhelter themſelves from the attacks of conſcience; of the ſceptical principles to which they have recourſe; and of the ſelf-deceiving opinions with which they flatter themſelves concerning their own character, concerning the goodneſs of God, and the allowances

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SERM. IV. which they hope will be made for human infirmity and ſtrong temptations. But all thoſe palliatives of guilt are no other to the ſoul, than the empirick medicines that are applied to the diſeaſes of the body; which diſguiſe the diſeaſe, without removing it; which procures a little temporary eaſe, and conceal from the patient the danger of his ſtate; but drive the diſtemper to the vitals, and make it break forth in the end with redoubled force. Thus may thoſe dangerous opiates of conſcience ſoothe a man for a while, in the days of his proſperity. Amidſt the buſtle of active life, and as long as the fluſter of gay and youthful ſpirits laſts, he may go on in the commiſſion of many crimes with ſmoothneſs and ſeeming peace. But let the ſober and ſerious hour come, which, ſooner or later, muſt come to all; let the amuſements of life be withdrawn, and the man be left alone to his own reflections; the power of truth will ſoon prove too ſtrong for all that is oppoſed to it, and pierce into his heart.—— The voice of nature, of conſcience, and

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and of God, will make itself be heard within him. He will feel that he is a wretch. He will become despicable in his own sight. He will become sensible that all good men have reason to hate him, and that the just Governor of the world has reason to punish him. Conscience, bringing to remembrance all his secret crimes, will hold them up to his view with this fearful inscription written upon them, *God will bring every work into judgment.* Hence the haggard look, and the restless couch; days never free from bitterness, and nights given up to remorse. SERM. IV.

This remorse will prey the deeper on the bad man's heart, if it shall happen, as it sometimes does, that there was a period in his life when he was a different man; when, having been educated by virtuous parents in sober and religious principles, and being as yet uncorrupted by the world, he passed his days without reproach or blame. The recollection of what he then felt, compared with the state into which he has now brought himself by

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SERM. IV. forfeited integrity and honour, will wring his heart with ſad remembrance. "Once I knew what it was "to enjoy all the comforts of inno- "cence, and to take pleaſure in the "thoughts of heaven, when my hands "were unſtained and my mind was "pure. Then I was ever cheerful, "eaſy, and free. Heaven and earth "ſeemed to ſmile upon me. My "nights were peaceful, and my days "were pleaſant. Innocent joys and "comfortable hopes were ever at hand "to entertain my ſolitary hours.— "Where now are theſe gone? Why "am I thus ſo altered and changed "from what I was, and ſo uneaſy to "myſelf? What, alas! have I gained "by thoſe worldly purſuits and ambi- "tious plans which ſeduced me from "the plain and ſafe paths of integrity "and virtue."

Such are the wounds of the ſpirit, occaſioned either by folly, by paſſion, or by guilt, and too often by a complication of all the three together. For though they be of ſeparate conſideration, and each of them may be felt

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felt in a different degree, yet they are seldom parted wholly asunder from one another. Folly gives rise to unrestrained and disorderly passions. These betray men into atrocious crimes; and the wretched sinner is stung as by a three-headed snake; at once, reproached by reason for his folly, agitated by some strong passion, and tortured with a conscious sense of guilt.—When these disorders of the mind arise to their height, they are, of all miseries, the most dreadful. The vulgar misfortunes of life, poverty, sickness, or the loss of friends, in comparison with them, are trivial evils. Under such misfortunes, a man of tolerable spirit, or of a moderate share of virtue, will be able to find some consolation. But under the other, he can find none. What is but too decisive as to the degree in which they surpass all external evils, they are those wounds of the spirit, the shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse for guilt, which have so frequently produced that fatal crime, so much the reproach of our age and our country,

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SERM. IV. country which have driven men to the moſt abhorred of all evils, to death by their own hand, in order to ſeek relief from a life too embittered to be endured. Far from each of us be ſuch deſperate calamities!—But, if it be the certain tendency of thoſe wounds of the heart, to introduce the greateſt diſquietude and miſery into the life of man, then, from what has been ſaid, let us be taught,

In the firſt place, to give the moſt ſerious and vigilant attention to the government of our hearts. It may be thought by ſome, that the formidable repreſentation I have given of the miſerable effects of a wounded ſpirit, attaches only to them who have gone to the utmoſt lengths in folly or paſſion; but that, by ſome more temperate regulation of conduct, indulgence may be given, without harm, to the free gratification of certain favourite deſires.—Be aſſured, my brethren, that, under ideas of this kind, there lies much ſelf-deception. Suppoſing it in your

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your power to ſtop at ſome given point without ruſhing into the greateſt diſorders, ſtill you would ſuffer from the licence you had taken to drop the government of your hearts. The leſſer criminal never eſcapes without his ſhare of puniſhment. In proportion to the quantity you have drunk out of the poiſoned cup of pleaſure, you will feel your inward health and ſoundneſs impaired; or, to follow the metaphor of the text, not by a deep wound only, but by every ſlighter hurt given to the heart, you will ſuffer in that peace and tranquillity which makes the comfort of life. SERM. IV.

But beſides this conſideration, ſtrict attention is the more requiſite to the government of the heart, as the firſt introduction to thoſe diſorders which ſpread their conſequences ſo deep and wide, is for the moſt part gradual and inſenſible, and made by latent ſteps. Did all the evil clearly ſhow itſelf at the beginning, the danger would be leſs. But we are imperceptibly betrayed, and from one incautious attachment drawn on to another, till the government

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government of our hearts be at last utterly lost; and wounds inflicted there, which are not to be healed without much shame, penitence, and remorse.—How much does this call for the attention of youth in particular, whose raw and unexperienced minds are so apt to be caught by every new and enticing object that is held forth to their passions? How much does it concern them to beware of the commencements of evil, and to listen to the admonitions of the grave and the wise, who have gone through those dangerous paths on which they are beginning to enter? Let them never give up their hearts profusely to any attachment, without the countenance of reason and religion. Let them shut their ears to the seductions of folly and vice, and look with wary eye to those rocks on which so many others have split.—Nor is it only to youth that this admonition belongs. To the levities and passions of youth succeed the more sober follies of advancing years; which, under a graver appearance, are no less liable to seize and wound the heart.

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heart. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline is perpetually requisite of *keeping the heart with all diligence*; guarding it from whatever would annoy its healthy and sound estate; *as out of the heart are the issues either of Life or Death.* SERM. IV.

In the second place, it clearly appears, from what has been said, how much reason we all have to join in prayer to Almighty God, in addition to our own endeavours of guarding and governing our spirits; beseeching Him who made the heart, and who knows all its errors and wanderings, to aid and prosper us by his grace in this difficult undertaking. Well must he who knows any thing of himself at all, know how greatly divine assistance is needed here, and how little we can depend upon ourselves without it. For *deceitful*, as well as *desperately wicked*, are our hearts; and after all our pretences to ability and wisdom, how often, by the seductions of folly and of passion, have the wise, the learned, and the admired, been shamefully carried

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ried away?—Moſt earneſtly to be deſired is that bleſſing promiſed in the Goſpel, of a new heart and a new ſpirit, which ſhall render us ſuperior to the attacks of vanity and vice. *Who can underſtand his errors? Cleanſe me, O God, from ſecret faults: Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right ſpirit within me. That which I ſee not, teach thou me; and lead me in thy way everlaſting.*

In the laſt place, all that has been ſaid on the ſubject tends to impreſs us with a ſenſe of this awful truth, that the Great God hath already began to puniſh bad men for their ſins and vices. You ſee his hand clearly marked in all that they are made to ſuffer by the Wounded Spirit. You ſee that he has not delayed all retribution to another world; but hath in this world begun to act as a Governour and a Judge; ſhowing, by an eſtabliſhed order of things, that while he loves the righteous, he *hateth all the workers of iniquity*. With a wiſdom peculiar to himſelf, he hath made the puniſhments

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punishments due to sinners to arise directly from their own behaviour, and to be inflicted by their own hands. He hath no occasion to send forth destroying angels against them; the thunder which is ever in his hands, needs not be pointed at the heads of the guilty. He need only leave them to themselves; and presently their *wickedness begins to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, till they fully see and feel what an *evil thing and bitter it was, to depart from the Lord their God.* Conscious, while their hearts are bleeding within them, that they are only *reaping the fruit of their own doings*, the sense of deserving what they suffer, both aggravates the suffering, and forces them to acknowledge the justice of it. SERM. IV.

When we behold such plain marks of wise and just government taking place among men, who shall take upon him to say that all things come alike to all men, and that there is no more than a promiscuous distribution of good and evil by Providence on earth? However it may seem in appearance,

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SERM. IV. pearance, it is far from being so in reality. We look to the outside of things. We are dazzled with that tinsel glare which prosperity sometimes throws around the worthless and the wicked. But what is that to true happiness and self-enjoyment? often, how little connected with it? Could you look into the hearts of men, another scene would open. You would see many a heart wounded and bleeding in secret, from a guilty conscience and remembered crimes, while gay looks were affectedly put on before the world. Comparing this galled and distressed state of mind, with the free and easy, the light and disencumbered spirit of a worthy and virtuous man, even under the pressures of life, you would forbear to charge Providence, and would readily acknowledge, that though the external distribution of the world's goods be promiscuous, the internal allotment of happiness is measured by the real characters of men.——On the whole, let us hold fast by this great truth, and by it govern our lives, that every man's real happiness or misery is made,

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by the appointment of the Creator, to depend more on himself, and on the proper government of his mind and heart, than upon any external thing, or than upon all external things put together; that for those who serve God, and study to keep their conscience clear from guilt, God hath provided peace and comfort on earth, as well as rewards hereafter; but, *saith my God, there is no peace to the wicked.*

SERM. IV.

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SERMON V.

On all Things working together for Good to the Righteous.

ROMANS, viii. 38.

We know that all Things work together for Good to them that love God, to them who are the Called according to his purpose.

SERM. V.

AMONG many antient philoſophers it was a favourite tenet, that all ſeeming diſorders in the world are rendered ſubſervient to the order and perfection of the univerſe; or, that all things work together for the good of the whole: But to this good of the whole, they conceived the intereſt of individuals to be oft-times obliged to yield.

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yield. The revelation of the Goſpel has opened to us a higher and more comfortable proſpect. For it aſſures us not only of the direct tendency of all things to general order, but to the conſummate happineſs of every individual who loves and ſerves God. While the Deity is ever carrying on the general ſyſtem of things to its proper perfection, the intereſt of no one good man is ſacrificed in any point to promote this end; but his life is, at the ſame time, a ſyſtem complete within itſelf, where all things are made to conſpire for bringing about his felicity. *We know*, ſays the Apoſtle, in my text, that is, we are aſſured, not by doubtful reaſonings with regard to which the wiſeſt might be perplexed, but by a divine promiſe on which the ſimple can firmly rely, that *all things work together for good of them that love God, to them who are the Called according to his purpoſe.*——This is that capital encouragement of religion, which virtually contains in itſelf all the other promiſes made in Scripture to the righteous, and, like a full and exuberant

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SERM. V. exuberant fountain, divides itself into a thousand streams to refresh the life of man with consolation and joy. It will therefore deserve our very full and particular consideration, both as to the extent of encouragement given, and the evidence on which our assurance of it rests.

THE first thing which should here draw our attention is, the character of those to whom the encouragement of the text is appropriated. For it is evidently not given indiscriminately to all, but limited to such as *love God*, and *are the called according to his purpose*; that is, chosen by him to eternal life. But lest the latter part of this description should appear too secret and mysterious to afford the encouragement intended, it is cleared up by the first and explanatory character, *them that love God*. Here is something plain and satisfactory on which we can rest. We need not say, Who shall ascend into heaven in order to bring us down from thence any information, whether our names be written in the book of life?

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life? It is sufficient to look into our- SERM. V.
selves, and the state of our heart. *The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it**. They that *love God*, and they who are *the called according to his purpose*, are the same. Divine love is the sacred character which marks those who are *sealed unto the day of redemption*.—This love of God is not to be understood as signifying merely some occasional ardour of affection: it imports that steady principle of goodness which becomes the spring of a pure and virtuous life. The same character is here meant, which is described in other passages of scripture, by *fearing and serving God*. They who truly love God, are they who love and imitate the divine perfections; they who love and obey the divine laws; they who love and pursue the divine approbation, as the great aim of their life.——Keeping this important article ever in view as a necessary limitation of the gracious decla-

* Deut. xxx, 14

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SERM. V. ration in the text, let us proceed to examine the full extent of that encouragement which it affords.

We begin with considering what the *good* is, for which it is here said that all things work in favour of the righteous. It is a term susceptible of very different acceptations. For many things appear good to some, which do not appear so to others; nay, the same things which have appeared to ourselves good at one time, have been far from appearing good at another. Assuredly that *good* which God promises as the reward of his servants, must be somewhat worthy of God to bestow; somewhat that depends not on the fluctuation of fancy and opinion. and that is not liable to change with the change of times. It must be some good of a fixed and permanent nature, which will be felt as such in every situation and period of our existence. But it is evident that such characters are not applicable to the external advantages of the world, riches, fame, and honours. These may occasionally

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ally be desirable, and at some times confer satisfaction on the possessor. But besides their uncertain and transient duration, they are far from conferring satisfaction at all times, even when they last. On the contrary, it is a certain fact, and manifest to general observation, that a man may possess all the external advantages of fortune, and lead withal a very miserable life. Suppose him to be disquieted in his own mind by envy, jealousy, revenge, or other violent passions, and harrassed with a guilty conscience, such a man cannot be said to have attained what is *good*. Would it have been worthy of the Supreme Being to have flattered his servants with the hope only of a good so fallacious, that in certain circumstances it might be consistent with the greatest misery?—No: that good, for the sake of which he makes all things work to those that love him, must be founded in the improvement and perfection of their nature in wisdom, grace, and virtue; in their good considered as rational and immortal beings; productive of a felicity which is with-

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SERM. V. in them, and ſhall abide with them for ever. While we look only to a preſent momemtary ſatisfaction, the Divine Being, in conſulting our welfare, provides for the whole of our exiſtence in time and eternity; connects the preſent with the future; and by his beneficent decree, ordains for each of his ſervants, that which, upon the whole, is *the beſt*—While *to the ſinner he giveth ſore travel, to gather and to heap up; he giveth to a man that is good in his ſight, wiſdom, and knowledge, and joy**.

HAVING aſcertained the ſenſe in which we are to underſtand *the good* for which God maketh all things to work, we proceed to conſider what is included in the extent of the expreſſion, of *all things working for this good*. In general, it includes all that happens to good men in this world; every ſtation and condition in which they are placed; every circumſtance in their lot, from the beginning to the end of their lives. Nothing befals them fortuitouſly, nothing happens in vain or without a

* Eccleſ. ii. 26.

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meaning;

meaning; but every event poſſeſſes its proper and deſtined place, and forms a link in that great chain of cauſes which is appointed to carry on their improvement and felicity. As all the rivers upon the face of the globe, however circuitous they may be in their progreſs, and however oppoſite in their courſe, yet meet at laſt in the ocean, and there contribute to increaſe the maſs of waters; ſo all the ſeemingly diſcordant events in the life of a good man are made to preſerve, upon the whole, an unerring tendency to his good, and to concur and conſpire for promoting it at the laſt. What a noble and ſublime view does this preſent of the ſupreme dominion of Providence, and of its care exerciſed over every righteous man! SERM. V.

When we deſcend to a more particular examination of what is included in the expreſſion here uſed, of *all things*, we may obſerve, firſt, that it includes a ſtate of worldly proſperity. For ſometimes this is appointed to fall to the ſhare of God's ſervants; nay, their worth and virtue have often been the means

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SERM. V. means of bringing it about. But it is not one of those things which are good in their own nature, till God makes it work for that purpose. What numbers of men has it poisoned and destroyed, cherishing the growth of wantonness and folly; and implanting in their breasts the seeds of those bad passions which spring up into many a crime! From such evils, the prosperity of good men is guarded by God. The poison is extracted from it, and the salutary part only left. It is rendered to them a comfortable and useful enjoyment of life, affording opportunity for the exercise of many virtues, which otherwise would not have come within their sphere.

But, *among all things that work for good*, it is probable that the evils of this life were particularly designed to be included, as what we might have least expected to be subservient to that purpose. It is nevertheless certain, that from the discipline of adversity, the most salutary improvements of human nature have been often derived. In that

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that ſevere ſchool the predominant errors of the mind have been corrected, the intemperance of the giddy ſpirit has been allayed and reformed, and that manly ſerioufneſs acquired which is the foundation of true wiſdom. By the *ſadneſs of the countenance, the heart* of the ſufferer *has been made better*; he has been trained up to fortitude of mind, improved in humanity to men, and formed to the habits of devotion and reſignation to God. SERM. V.

At the ſame time, it is only *if need be*, as the Apoſtle Peter ſpeaks*, that the righteous *are left for a ſeaſon in heavineſs*. If it be certain that all things work for their good, it follows of courſe, that there is no ſuperfluous ſeverity, no needleſs or unneceſſary trouble to them, in the conſtitution of things. Their afflictions never befal without a cauſe nor are ſent but upon a proper errand. Theſe ſtorms are never allowed to riſe, but in order to diſpel ſome noxious vapours, and to reſtore

* 1 Pet. i. 6.

ſalubrity

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SERM. V. salubrity to the moral atmosphere.—Herein appears, if we may be allowed so to speak, the wonderful art and skill of the Supreme Artificer, the profound depth of the divine wisdom, in extracting, from distresses and sorrows, the materials of peace and felicity. Nor are only the external calamities of good men subservient to this purpose; but their internal infirmities, their very failings and errors, are made, by the powerful influence of God's grace, to contribute ultimately to their good.—They are thereby instructed in the knowledge of themselves; they are properly humbled by the discovery of their own weakness; and trained to that becoming spirit of contrition and returning repentance, which is represented as giving joy to the angels in heaven. He who *maketh the wrath of man to praise him*, is not deficient in wisdom and power, to make even the failings of his servants, in this imperfect state of human nature, redound at last to his own glory, and to their good.

It must not escape observation, that the text suggests, not merely that all things

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things prove good in the iſſue, or even- SERM.
tually turn out to the benefit of the V.
righteous, but that they *work for it*.—
This expreſſion carries particular energy. It imports that *all things* are ſo formed by God as to become active cauſes of happineſs to thoſe who love him. His infinite wiſdom gives to things in themſelves moſt unapt, an aptitude and fitneſs to fulfil his own great ends; diſpoſes and prepares them for their proper effects; and makes dangers and evils his inſtruments for accompliſhing the felicity of his ſervants. There is a certain operation and proceſs always going on, by which, though we are inſenſible of it, all things are conſtantly advancing towards a happy iſſue. In the ſame manner as the operation of natural cauſes, though ſlow and unperceived, is ſure; as the ſeed which is ſown in the ground is every moment unfolding itſelf; and though no eye can trace the ſteps of its progreſs, yet, with a ſilent growth, is ripening and ſhooting forth its ſtalks; ſo in the moral world, throughout all the diſpenſations of Providence, there

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is the same latent, but certain progress of the seeds of virtue and holiness, tending towards perfection in the end.—*Light is sown for the righteous*, as the Psalmist beautifully employs this metaphor, *and gladness for the upright in heart**.

It is said in the text, not only that all things thus work, but that they *work together for good*; intimating that they are made to conspire and concur with one another, for bringing about what *is* best on the whole. Taken singly and individually, it might be difficult to conceive how each event wrought for good. They must be viewed in their consequences and effects; considered in all their dependencies and connections, as links hanging together to form one extensive chain. It is by adjusting into one consistent whole, the various events that fill up human life; arranging in the happiest succession all the occurrences of that complicated scene; and bending to his own purpose things

* Ps. xcvii. 11.

which

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which appear moſt oppoſite and contrary, that the Almighty accompliſhes his great plan in behalf of thoſe who *love him, and are the called according to his purpoſe.* SERM. V.

SUCH is that great edifice of encouragement and hope, which the goſpel of Chriſt hath reared for the conſolation of thoſe who ſincerely love and ſerve God. It remains now that we examine what the pillars are on which ſo mighty an edifice reſts. The Apoſtle ſpeaks, you ſee, in a ſtrain of full aſſurance. He does not ſay we believe, or we hope, but *we know*, that all things work together for good.—Let us conſider,

IN the firſt place, the evidence in ſupport of this doctrine, which ariſes from the perfections of the divine nature. In general, that God is good to all, and that his goodneſs is eſpecially exerted in behalf of the righteous, is a principle of religion, which none will diſpute. The only queſtion is, how far that goodneſs extends, and whether

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SERM. V. ther we can conceive it as extending to all that is implied in the text.—Something it muſt be confeſſed, there is aſtoniſhing, and on firſt view almoſt incredible in the aſſertion, that amidſt that infinite combination of events which carry on the general order of the univerſe, nothing ſhall ever happen but what advances the happineſs of each good man; and which ſhall tend to his private intereſt, as much as if his exiſtence had formed a ſyſtem by itſelf.—But how aſtoniſhing ſoever this may ſeem to us, let us firſt reflect, that this ſuppoſes no effort beyond the power of Him who is Almighty, or beyond the ſkill of Him who is infinite in wiſdom. We muſt not meaſure divine operations by the feeble energies of man.—God is the firſt cauſe of all that exiſts and acts. All events are, at every moment, in his hands. Nothing can make any reſiſtance to his purpoſe, or fall out in any way beſide, or beyond his plan. At one glance he perceives how all things are going on throughout his univerſe. Not the minuteſt object

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is overlooked by Him. No multiplicity of affairs distracts Him: for to the supreme intelligence, all things are present at once; and to the concerns of every good man, his observation and attention reach as fully as if there were no other object under his government. SERM. V.

As there is nothing therefore, in the promise of the text, which divine power and wisdom cannot effect, so neither is there any thing in it but what divine goodness gives us reason to believe shall be fulfilled. The goodness of the Supreme Being is very different from that of men. Among them, it is a principle occasionally operating, but always limited, and always subject to alteration and change. Their benefits, though liberally bestowed at one time, will at another time be stopped by the intervention of contrary passions. Their benevolence decays; selfishness and indifference succeed. But in the nature of the Deity, there is no principle which can produce alteration or change in his benevolent purpose once formed. *Without variableness or*

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SERM. V. *ſhadow of turning*, whom he hath once *loved he loveth to the end. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance**. His goodneſs therefore conſiſts, not in a mere temporary effuſion of bleſſings, but is permanent and ſteady; leading him, not ſimply to beſtow ſome things that are good, and then to ſtop, but to carry his gracious purpoſe to the utmoſt; in every inſtance, to do what is beſt for his ſervants on the whole, or in the words of of the text, to make *all things work for their good.*

Let us now conſider what it would import, if any ſingle occurrence were to happen in the courſe of human affairs, which had not a good deſign; which did not, in one form or other, promote the benefit of the righteous. What would it import, but that in ſuch an inſtance, either the divine power and wiſdom had fallen ſhort of their effect, or the divine goodneſs had neglected and forſaken the virtuous? It were blaſphemous to ſuppoſe that the

* John, xiii. 1. Rom. xi. 29.

nature

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nature of the Deity was changed; or SERM. V.
that there were in his government of the world, ſome vacant ſpaces, or neglected intervals, in which he ſuffered the reigns of adminiſtration to drop out of his hands, and ſome evil principle to counteract his general ſyſtem.— But as all ſuch ſuppoſitions are manifeſtly inconſiſtent with the nature of that God in whom Chriſtians believe, there appears to follow, from the conſideration of his perfections, evidence next to demonſtration, for the truth of that doctrine which the text contains.

But that we may not reſt its evidence on our own reaſonings only, let us next conſider what diſcovery of his high deſigns God hath been pleaſed to make in the Revelation of the Goſpel. Here it is amply ſufficient to have recourſe to one ſignal diſpenſation of his government, the redemption of the world by Jeſus Chriſt. Hence ariſes an argument which carries the moſt convincing force; and which accordingly, in a few verſes after the

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SERM. V. the text, is employed by the Apoſtle in ſupport of that doctrine I have been illuſtrating. *He that ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how how ſhall he not with him alſo, freely give us all things?*—Can we in any inſtance diſtruſt Him who hath given us this higheſt proof of his love? If he ſcrupled not to beſtow this beſt gift, is there any other bleſſing he will be inclined to withhold? Having already done ſo much, will he leave incomplete his own great work?—By the death of Chriſt, we are taught in ſcripture, that atonement was made for ſin. He underwent in his ſufferings the puniſhment due to us. He is ſaid to have been *wounded for our tranſgreſſions, and bruiſed for our iniquities; to have borne our ſins in his own body on the tree.* From this view of the doctrine of redemption, it naturally follows, that Chriſt having purchaſed for his followers the pardon of their ſins, the afflictions they now undergo are not properly to be conſidered as puniſhments but as chaſtiſements intended for their good.—Add to this, that it is the peculiar

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culiar province of our Lord in his present exalted ſtate, to adminiſter all things for the good of his church. For this end his regal power is employed. To this end his mediation and interceſſion are directed; and either theſe muſt in ſome caſes prove ineffectual, or it muſt follow that all things work for the good of them who love him. As much evidence then as we have for thoſe capital truths on which the whole of Chriſtianity reſts, the ſame we have for that high encouragement afforded by the text. SERM. V.

It remains to take notice, in the laſt place, of the expreſs and multiplied promiſes of the ſacred Scripture to the ſame purpoſe with that in the text. Though the text alone might have appeared ſufficient for our encouragement; yet, as repeated aſſurances of the ſame thing come home with greater weight to the mind, it hath pleaſed God to make this full proviſion for confirming the truſt and hope of his ſervants: and there can be no doubt that the plain and explicit words of the divine promiſes have had the moſt

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comfortable influence on many who could not so well have supported themselves under the trials of life, either by reasonings taken from the divine perfections, or by inferences drawn from the doctrine of redemption. Accordingly, we are not left merely to reason or to infer, but are, in express terms, told by God himself, that *godliness shall be profitable to all things; that God the Lord is a sun and a shield, giving grace and glory, and withholding no good thing from them that walk uprightly; that no evil shall happen to the just; for the Lord is their keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps; that his eyes are ever on the righteous; that when they pass through the waters, he will be with them, and through the rivers they shall not overflow them;* and in fine *that all his paths are mercy and truth to such as fear him, and keep his covenant**. These promises, and many more to the same effect, with which the Scripture abounds, plainly express a particular care of Heaven

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Ps. cxxi. 3, 4, &c.

exercised

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exercised about every single good man; they signify as real an interposition of Providence, as if the laws of nature had been suspended on his account. SERM. V.

The opinion entertained by some, that the Providence of God extends no farther than to a general superintendance of the laws of nature, without interposing in the particular concerns of individuals, is contrary both to reason and to scripture. It renders the government of the Almighty altogether loose and contingent, and would leave no ground for reposing any trust under its protection. For the majority of human affairs would then be allowed to fluctuate in a fortuitous course, without moving in any regular direction, and without tending to any one scope. The uniform doctrine of the sacred writings is, that throughout the universe nothing happens without God; that his hand is ever active, and his decree or permission intervenes in all; that nothing is too great or unwieldy for his management, and nothing so minute and inconsiderable as to be

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SERM. V. below his inſpection and care. While he is guiding the ſun and the moon in their courſe through the Heavens; while in this inferiour world he is ruling among empires, *ſtilling the ragings of the waters and the tumults of the people*, he is at the ſame time watching over the humble good man, who, in the obſcurity of his cottage, is ſerving and worſhipping Him. In order to expreſs this vigilance of Providence in the ſtrongeſt terms, our Saviour himſelf has ſaid, that the very *hairs of our head are all numbered by God*; and that *while two ſparrows are ſold for a farthing, not one of them falls to the ground without his pleaſure.* The conſolation which this affords, he applies to his diſciples in what follows: *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many ſparrows**. It is on this doctrine of a ſpecial and particular Providence he grounds that exhortation againſt worldly ſolicitude and anxiety, which accords ſo fully with the argument we

* Matth. x. 30, 31.

have

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have been purſuing; *your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of; take therefore no thought for the morrow; but ſeek firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you*.* SERM. V.

THUS it has been ſhewn on what grounds our aſſured belief reſts of the declaration in the text, that all things are made to work for the good of the righteous. It is not a promiſe which admits of ambiguity, and which we might be afraid to interpret to its full extent. It is on every ſide confirmed by the moſt ſober reaſonings we can form from the divine perfections; by the whole tenour of the diſpenſation of redemption; by many repeated aſſurances given us in the ſacred writings.

THE great objection, I am aware, that will be ſtarted by many againſt the whole of what has been advanced in this diſcourſe, is founded on the ſeeming prevalence of evil and diſorder in

* Matth. iv. 33.

the

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SERM. V. the world. This, it will be said, is so conspicuous, as to be inconsistent with the representation that has been given of a Supreme Being, who attends, in every instance, to the welfare of every good man. The present state of the world may be suspected to carry more the appearance of a conflict between two opposite principles of good and evil, who divide the empire of the world, and of course create a mixture of some good things with more that are evil. How often, it will be said, are the best men insensible of any such gradual improvement, or any such tendency in the general course of things, as has been represented, to promote their interest; but on the contrary, left comfortless and forlorn, in the midst of surrounding prosperous vice, to mourn over disappointed hopes and bitter sorrows, without receiving the least mark of favourable intentions from Heaven? Hence the exclamations they have often uttered; "Where is the Lord, and where the sceptre of "righteousness and truth? Doth God indeed

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" indeed ſee, and is there knowledge SERM.
" in the Moſt High? Or hath He V.
" *forgotten to be gracious, and in anger*
" *ſhut up his tender mercies?*"

Now, in anſwer to ſuch objections, let us conſider how much reaſon there is for aſcribing thoſe dark and doubtful appearances, to the narrow and confined views which our ſtate allows us to take. The deſigns of the Almighty are enlarged and vaſt. They comprehend not only the whole of our preſent exiſtence, but they include worlds unknown, and ſtretch forwards into eternity. Hence much darkneſs and myſtery muſt of courſe reſt at preſent on the adminiſtration of God; and we, who ſee only ſo ſmall a portion of a great and complicated ſyſtem, muſt be very inadequate judges, both of the tendency of each part, and of the iſſue of the whole. We behold no more than the outſide of things. Our views glide over the ſurface; and even along that ſurface, they extend but a ſhort way. But under the ſurface there lie hidden ſprings, that are ſet in motion by

SERM. V. by a ſuperiour hand, and are bringing forward revolutions unforeſeen by us. There are *wheels moving within wheels*, as the prophet Ezekiel beheld in myſterious viſion*.——We, meaſuring all things by the ſhortneſs of our own duration, are conſtantly accelerating our deſigns to their period. We are eager in advancing rapidly towards the completion of our wiſhes. But it is not ſo with God. In his ſight, *a thouſand years are as one day*: and while his infinitely wiſe plans are continually advancing with ſure progreſs, that progreſs to our impatience appears ſlow, Let us have patience for a while, and theſe plans ſhall in due time be developed, and will explain themſelves. His language to us is, *What I do thou knoweſt not now, but thou ſhalt know hereafter*†.

Let us attend to the analogy of nature. We ſhall find it to hold very generally, both in the moral and natural world, that nothing ariſes

* Ezek. x. 10. † John, xviii. 7.

ſuddenly

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ſuddenly to the perfection of its ſtate; that all improvement is carried on by leiſurely gradations; and that moſt frequently it is through harſh and unpromiſing beginnings, things are brought to a favourable concluſion. This might be illuſtrated by many examples.—Take, for one inſtance, the progreſs of the ſeaſons. Who that for the firſt time beheld the earth, in midſt of winter, bound up with froſt, or drenched in floods of rain, or covered with ſnow, would have imagined that Nature, in this dreary and torpid ſtate, was working towards its own renovation in the ſpring? Yet we by experience know that thoſe viciſſitudes of winter are neceſſary for fertilizing the earth; and that under wintry rains and ſnows lie concealed the ſeeds of thoſe roſes that are to bloſſom in the ſpring; of thoſe fruits that are to ripen in ſummer; and of the corn and wine, which are, in harveſt, to make glad the heart of man. We perhaps reliſh not ſuch diſagreeable commencementsof the pleaſing ſeaſon. It would be more agreeable

SERM. VI. able to us, to be always entertained with a fair and clear atmoſphere, with cloudleſs ſkies, and perpetual ſunſhine: while yet, in ſuch climates as we have moſt knowlege of, the earth, were it always to remain in ſuch a ſtate, would refuſe to yield its fruits; and in the midſt of our imagined ſcenes of beauty, the ſtarved inhabitants would periſh for want of food.——Let us therefore quietly ſubmit to Nature and to Providence. Let us convince this life, of whoſe evils we ſo often complain, to be the winter of our exiſtence. Then the rains muſt fall, and the winds muſt roar around us. But, ſheltering ourſelves, as we can, under a good conſcience, and under faith and truſt in God, let us wait till the ſpring arrive. For a ſpring, an eternal ſpring, awaits the people of God. In the new heavens and the new earth no ſtorms ſhall any more ariſe, nor any unpleaſing viciſſitudes of ſeaſon return. It ſhall then at laſt appear how former ſufferings have produced their proper effect; how the tempeſts

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tempeſts of life have tended to bring on an everlaſting calm; in fine, how *all things have wrought together for good to them that love God, and who are the called ac cording to his purpoſe.*

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SERMON VI.

On the Love of our Country.

[Preached 18th April 1793, on the day of a National Fast appointed by Government, on occasion of the War with the French Republic.]

PSALM cxxii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Pray for the peace of Jeruſalem; they ſhall proſper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and proſperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' ſake, I will now ſay, Peace be within thee. Becauſe of the houſe of the Lord our God, I will ſeek thy peace.

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IT is one of the infirmities belonging to human nature, that continued enjoyment of the higheſt bleſſings is apt to depreciate them

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them in our eſteem. This unhappy weakneſs ſhows itſelf, not only with reſpect to the light of the ſun, and the beauties of nature, which we have been long accuſtomed to behold, but alſo with reſpect to health, peace, religion, and liberty. Let any one of thoſe bleſſings have been long familiar to us; let a tract of time have effaced the remembrance of the diſtreſs which we ſuffered from the want of it; and it is ſurpriſing how lightly men are ready to prize the the degree of happineſs which they continue to poſſeſs.—In midſt of that peaceful and ſecure ſtate which the inhabitants of this land have long enjoyed; ſurrounded with the chief bleſſings that render life comfortable, how few have any juſt ſenſe of the gratitude they owe to Heaven for ſuch ſingular felicity? Nay, is it not much to be lamented that there ſhould have ſprung up among us an unaccountable ſpirit of diſcontent and diſaffection, feeding itſelf with ideal grievances and viſionary projects of reformation, till it has gone nigh to light up the torch of ſedition? SERM. VI.

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sedition?——When government has now, for wise and proper reasons, called us together in a religious assembly, our thoughts cannot be more suitably employed than in reviewing the grounds on which, as good Christians and faithful citizens, we have reason to entertain the warmest affection for our native country, and to put a just value on that constitution of government, civil and sacred, under which it is placed.——In the words of the text, you see with what zeal the heart of the pious Psalmist glowed for the prosperity of his country. By the accumulation of expressions which he employs, and the variety of topics he suggests, you see the fervour with which this subject animated his heart.—It will be proper to consider, first, the grounds on which love for our country rests; and next, the duties to which this affection naturally gives rise.

But, before entering on any of those topics, it may be proper to take notice of the speculations of some pretended philosophers,

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ſophers, who repreſent the love of our country as hardly entitled to any place among the virtues. They affect to conſider it a mere prejudice of education; a narrow attachment, which tends to operate againſt more enlarged intereſts. We ought, ſay they, to view ourſelves as citizens of the world, and extend our benevolence, equally, to all nations and all mankind.—Nothing can be more empty and futile than ſuch reaſonings. The wiſdom of our Creator hath linked us by the ties of natural affection, firſt to our families and children; next to our brothers, relations, and friends; then to our acquaintance, and to the ſeveral ſocieties and communities to which we belong. By inſtincts implanted in our nature, He has formed our hearts to enter readily into their intereſts; and has thus directed our benevolence to act primarily within that ſphere, where its exertions can be moſt powerful and moſt uſeful. It is evident, that by acting on this plan, the general welfare is promoted in a much higher degree,

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gree, than if our ſocial affections had no particular direction given them, but were to float, as it were, in empty ſpace, without any more determined object on which to act than the whole human race, where they never could act with any effect. He who contends that he is not bound to have any more concern for the intereſts of Great Britain, than for thoſe of France, or any other country, ought to hold, on the ſame grounds, that he is under no obligation to conſult the welfare of his children and family, his brothers and friends, more than that of the moſt diſtant ſtranger; being equally connected, as he holds, with all, by the common brotherhood of the human race. It is much to be ſuſpected, that this wonderful extenſive philanthropy is only the language of thoſe who have no affections at all; or perhaps, that it is the language aſſumed by ſome, who, bearing in their hearts a ſecret preference to the intereſts of another country above their own, but a preference which they chooſe not to avow, affect to cover it under

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under this disguise, of a liberal, enlarged spirit. SERM. VI.

Let us, my friends, disclaiming all such refinements of false philosophy, and following the dictates of plain good sense, and natural affection, resolve to love our native country, and in every proper way to show our attachment to it. This was the spirit which so honourably distinguished patriots, heroes, and legislators of old, and has transmitted their names with veneration to posterity; while they, who felt no affection for the country to which they belonged, or who were treacherous to its interest, have been stigmatized with infamy among all civilized nations. I admit that there have been occasions, on which attachment to a particular country has been pursued to a very unjustifiable length. Wherever it has led the natives of one country to state themselves as enemies to the rest of mankind, and to endeavour at aggrandizing themselves by ruining all around them, the pretended love of their country is then become no other than a conspiracy against all

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SERM. VI. other nations, and instead of being a virtue is the offspring of ambition, pride, and vanity.

I proceed now to shew the just grounds on which it becomes us to be zealous for the welfare of that happy island, to which we have the honour and the blessing to belong. Let us consider our native country in three lights; as the seat of private enjoyment and happiness; as the seat of true religion; as the seat of laws, liberty, and good government.

I. As the seat of all our best enjoyment in private life. There, my brethren, after we first drew breath, was our tender infancy reared with care; there, our innocent childhood sported; there, our careless youth grew up amidst companions and friends; there, our dearest connexions were formed; there, after having passed the happiest years of our life, we look forward for our old age to rest in peace.—These are circumstances which endear, and ought to endear a home, a native land, to every human heart. If there be any names known

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known among men that awaken tender sentiments in the breaſt, the names of father, mother, ſpouſe, child, brother, ſiſter, or friend, theſe all recall our thoughts to our native land, and cannot, even in idea, be ſeperated from it. When we name our own country, we name the ſpot of the earth within which all that is moſt dear to us lies. To be long abſent from it, is a circumſtance of diſtreſs; but to be excluded from the hope of ever returning to it, ſinks the ſpirits of the worthy and the brave into extreme depreſſion. Its very duſt appears to them to be precious. Its well-known fields and mountains, and rivers, become, in their eyes, a ſort of conſecrated ground; the remembrance of which often touches the heart with ſenſations of more tender joy, than can be raiſed by ſcenes more rich, and objects more ſplendid, in any foreign land. SERM. VI.

Theſe are feelings, which nature, or rather the God of nature, has implanted in the mind of man; and baſe and vile is he who ſtudies to eraſe them, intimately con-

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SERM. VI. nected as they are with our very beſt affections.—Can we think, my friends, how long we have ſat *under our vine and our fig-tree*, in peace and joy, encircled by our families and friends, in that happy land we poſſeſs; and with this pleaſing remembrance dwelling on our minds, can we think with indifference of any danger which threatens the welfare of that country which has been the mother, the nurſe, the guardian of us all? Can we think without horror, of foreign invaſion laying waſte our fruitful and ſmiling fields, or of lawleſs anarchy and tumultuary mobs attacking our peaceful habitations?—No! *Peace be within thy walls, and proſperity within thy palaces*, will ever be the earneſt prayer of every virtuous man; *for my brethren and companions' ſake, I will ever ſay, Peace be within thee!*

II. We love our country as the ſeat of true religion. Freed from the dominion of Popiſh ſuperſtition and darkneſs which ſo long overſpread the earth, here the

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the light of the bleſſed reformation continues to ſhine in its greateſt ſplendour. Here the forms of religious worſhip are encumbred with no pageantry of vain rites; but, agreeably to God's word, are plain and ſimple, yet ſolemn and venerable. Religion has among us neither been the engine of eccleſiaſtical tyranny, nor the inſtrument of princely deſpotiſm. It has maintained a proper alliance with the regular government of the ſtate, and the order of public tranquility. The church that has been eſtabliſhed by law, in the two ſeparate diviſions of the iſland, is ſuited to the genius and diſpoſitions of the people in each. While to the eſtabliſhed church is given that protection and ſupport from government, which both the intereſts of religion and the welfare of the ſtate render proper and due; yet no rigid conformity to it is exacted. All perſecution for conſcience ſake, is unknown. They who, in their modes of thinking, or in their religious forms, differ from the eſtabliſhed church, are at full liberty, without reproach, to

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SERM. VI. worship God according to their own opinions and the rites of their fathers, as long as they infringe not the public tranquillity, nor disturb the state.

I now ask, what establishment of religion more friendly to public happiness, could be desired or framed? How zealous ought we to be for its preservation? How much on our guard against every danger which threatens to trouble or overthrow it?—Can there be any among us so infatuated as to wish to exchange it for that new form of things which has produced such fatal effects on a neighbouring land? Were it ever to be introduced among us, it is not the return of antient superstition, it is not the bondage of the church of Rome we would have to dread; evils great in themselves, but small in comparison of what such a revolution would produce. As soon as under the guise of philosophy, and with the pretence of unlimited toleration, the established forms of religion were demolished in France, the flood-gates were opened to pour a torrent of avowed infidelity,

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fidelity, atheiſm, and all the groſſeſt immoralities, over that devoted country. We have beheld the throne and the altar overthrown together; and nothing but a wretched ruin left, where once a ſtately fabric ſtood. We have ſeen the venerable miniſters of religion, ſtripped of their ſubſiſtence, torn from their churches, driven from there homes, and forced to wander as exiles, and beg their bread in a foreign land.——We have ſeen the laſt conſolation of the wretched deſtroyed, and the grave ſealed againſt their hope, by the public declaration that death is an eternal ſleep. ——Such have been the bleſſed fruits of that new order of things which boaſted of being to reſtore happineſs to all the nations. Such are the conſequences we have to expect among ourſelves, if ever the like dangerous opinions ſhall prevail in Britain.—With horror let us turn away from the thought. With earneſtneſs let us *pray for the peace of our Jeruſalem; and for the houſe of the Lord our God, let us zealouſly ſeek its good.*

III. We

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III. We love our country as the ſeat of liberty and laws; a mild, wiſe, and happy government. This opens a much wider field of diſcourſe than the bounds of a ſermon admit. But on this part of the ſubject being happily anticipated by ſo many excellent publications which have lately appeared, I ſhall content myſelf with making a few leading obſervations.——The end for which men unite in ſociety and ſubmit to government are, to enjoy ſecurity to their property, and freedom to their perſons from all injuſtice or violence. The more completely thoſe ends are obtained, with the leaſt diminution of perſonal liberty, the nearer ſuch government approaches to perfection: I ſay, approaches to it; for a perfect government is a mere chimera. Before we can expect it to take place, we muſt wait till we ſee any one thing whatever arrive at perfection on earth. The two extremes to be guarded againſt are, deſpotiſm, where all are ſlaves; and anarchy, where all would rule, and none obey.

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The Britiſh government may appear at different periods to have inclined ſometimes to the one, and ſometimes to the other of thoſe extremes. In its preſent ſtate, it may juſtly be accounted to be removed to an equal diſtance from either of thoſe evils; and therefore to have approached nearer to the perfection of ſocial order, than any other government, ancient or modern. To this point it has arrived in the progreſs of ages, not in conſequence of theories formed by ſpeculative men, ſuch as our modern reformers, but in conſequence of experiments made, and trials undergone. Experience, that great parent of all, but eſpecially of political, wiſdom, taught a brave, generous, and high-ſpirited people, how to correct, by degrees, preceding evils, and to form the wiſeſt plan for liberty and ſecurity. In this ſtate we now find the Britiſh conſtitution. It ſtands among the nations of the earth, like an ancient oak in the wood, which, after having overcome many a blaſt, overtops the other trees of the foreſt, and commands reſpect and veneration.

All

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All foreigners look to it with wonder, and with envy, as the happieſt ſyſtem that ever was deviſed for uniting dignity in the magiſtrate and liberty in the ſubject, with protection and ſecurity to all. Juſtly may we challenge thoſe who attempt to criticiſe it, to produce from the annals of hiſtory, any example of ſuch a multitude of men as the Britiſh ſubjects, held together in the bonds of civil ſociety, under ſo few reſtraints, and with ſuch full enjoyment of freedom as we poſſeſs: bleſſed too for a whole century paſt with a ſucceſſion of princes, who made the laws of the land the rule of their government; bleſſed now with a Sovereign at the head of the empire, to whom faction itſelf cannot impute, throughout his long reign, any acts of tyranny, cruelty, or oppreſſion; whoſe perſonal virtues and whoſe domeſtic conduct hold forth to the nation ſuch a high example of piety, decency, and good order, as, if generally followed, would render all his ſubjects happy.

In oppoſition to ſuch ſentiments as I have now delivered in favour of the conſtitution

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constitution of our country, we are called upon, by a certain set of men, to look to a republic as the glory of all governments. There, we are told, every man comes forth to act his part with vigour; and by the exertion of his talents, has opportunities of rising to the highest distinction and power. ——In reply to this, let it be observed, first, that there are no advantages claimed by a republic, but what under the British constitution are enjoyed to the full. On the exertion of any laudable and honourable talent whatever, no restraint is laid; no odious distinctions take place between the nobility and the people; no severe exclusive privileges are possessed by the former to the prejudice of the latter; but merit in every rank has the freest scope, and examples abound of persons rising by their talents from ordinary rank and humble birth to high distinction in the state. SERM. VI.

But next, it may be boldly asserted, that of all the forms of government which have been established on the earth, the republican is attended with the

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SERM. VI. the greateſt diſadvantages to thoſe who live under it. In a ſmall ſtate, where the people reſemble the inhabitants of one family, the management of their concerns can more ſafely be carried on by their own joint counſels, without any ſupreme magiſtrate. But if government be extended over a large territory, and over numerous inhabitants of different orders and fortunes, it has ever been found impoſſible to preſerve any well-regulated balance of power under a republican conſtitution. It has ever been, and never can be, any other, than a perpetual conteſt between oligarchy and democracy; between the rich and the poor; between a few popular leaders who aſpire to the chief influence, and the unruly violence of a turbulent multitude. In ſuch ſtates an internal warfare of this kind has been almoſt always carried on, with ſuch violent convulſions and party animoſities, as have given riſe to more miſeries than have been ſuffered under any other form of government whatever.——To no purpoſe are quoted to us the heroes of Greece and Rome.

Amidſt

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Amidſt the agitations of popular go- SERM. VI.
vernment, occaſions will ſometimes be afforded for eminent abilities to break forth with peculiar luſtre. But while public agitations allow a few individuals to be uncommonly diſtinguiſhed, the general condition of the people remains calamitous and wretched. Under deſpotic governments, miſerable indeed is the condition of thoſe who are near the throne. But while they are often the ſport, and the victims of capricious cruelty, the ordinary maſs of the people, at a diſtance from the thunder of power, are left, for the moſt part, in their inferiour ſituations, unmoleſted. Whereas, under a multitude of popular governours, oppreſſion is more extenſively felt. It penetrates into the interiour of families; and by republican tyranny the humble and obſcure are liable to be as much haraſſed and vexed as the great and the wealthy.

If any one doubt of thoſe facts, let him look at the preſent ſtate of the republic eſtabliſhed in that country to which we have ſo often been unfortunately

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SERM. VI. nately obliged to allude. He will there behold a memorable example ſet forth to the world; but an example, not for imitation, but for inſtruction and caution; an example, not of exploits to be copied, or of advantages to be gained; but of all the evils againſt which men, joined in ſociety, ought to ſtand on their guard. He will behold the republican halls hung round with monuments of proſcriptions, maſſacres, impriſonments, requiſitions, domiciliary ſearches, and ſuch other trophies of the glorious victory of republicaniſm over monarchical power. *O my ſoul, come not thou into their ſecret; into their aſſembly, mine honour, be not thou united; for their anger was fierce, and their wrath was cruel**.

ENOUGH has now been ſaid to convince every reaſonable ſubject of the Britiſh government, that he has good grounds for loving and reſpecting his country. It remains to point out the

* Geneſis, xlix. 6, 7.

duties

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duties to which the love of our coun- SERM. VI.
try gives rise. Though these branch out into many particulars, they may be comprised under two general heads; the duties which are required of us in our character as private men, and those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens.

FIRST, as private men and Christians, let us cultivate those virtues which are essential to the prosperity of our country. The foundation of all public happiness must be laid in the good conduct of individuals; in their industry, sobriety, justice, and regular attention to the duties of their several stations. Such virtues are the sinews and strength of the state; they are the supports of its prosperity at home, and of its reputation abroad; while luxury, corruption, venality, and idleness, unnerve the public vigour, disgrace the public character, and pave the way to general ruin. Every vice, however fashionable, that becomes prevalent, is the infusion of so much poison into the public

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SERM. VI. public cup; and in proportion to the degree of its prevalence, will the health and ſtrength of the nation be impaired. Few of us by our arms, and fewer ſtill by our counſels, can have influence in promoting that welfare of our country which all profeſs to deſire. But there is one ſphere in which all of us can act as benefactors to it; by ſetting a good example, each in his own line, and performing a worthy and honourable part. *Righteouſneſs* will *ever exalt a nation*; and *wickedneſs* will be, firſt, the reproach, and then the *ruin of every people.*

Among thoſe virtues to which the love of our country calls us, let us not forget piety to God. Without a proper ſenſe of religion, and a due acknowledgment of that ſupreme Power which rules among the kingdoms, no nation was ever found to proſper long. Let thoſe ſophiſtical reaſoners, who would teach us that philoſophy ought now to ſuperſede the ancient prejudices of Religion, look to the hiſtory of thoſe republics which they ſo highly admire,

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admire, especially to the history of the Romans. They will there find, that, during the freest and most flourishing periods of the republic, the Romans were the most religious of all nations. The Senate at no time assembled, no Consul entered on his office, no great public measure was ever undertaken, without previous religious services, without prayers and sacrifice. After every victory, solemn thanksgivings were offered to the gods; and upon any defeat that was sustained, public humiliations and processions were decreed, in order to deprecate the displeasure of Heaven. That much superstition and folly entered into what they called religion, will be readily admitted; but still it implied reverence to a supreme Power in Heaven, which ruled all the affairs of men, and was entitled to their homage. Hence that sacred respect to an oath, as an inviolable obligation, which long distinguished the Romans; and historians have remarked, that when the reverence for an oath began to be diminished, and the SERM. VI.

SERM. VI. looſe epicurean ſyſtem which diſcarded the belief of Providence to be introduced, the Roman honour and proſperity from that period began to decline. ——Theſe are things that belong to our admonition, on whom *the ends of the world are come.*

In the ſecond place, as we would ſhow our love to our country, let us join to the virtues of private men, thoſe which belong to us in a political capacity as ſubjects and citizens. Theſe muſt appear in loyalty to our ſovereign, in ſubmiſſion to the authority of rulers and magiſtrates, and in readineſs to ſupport the meaſures that are taken for public welfare and defence. Without regard to ſuch duties as theſe, it is evident, not only that the ſtate cannot flouriſh, but even that it cannot ſubſiſt. Accordingly they are ſtrongly bound upon us by the authority of ſcripture. *Let every ſoul be ſubject to the higher powers; whoſoever reſiſteth the power, reſiſteth the ordinance of God. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but*

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*but to the evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake**. Such passages as these, there is little danger of our misunderstanding at present, as if they enjoined a slavish submission to authority in things unlawful. This is by no means the extreme to which the spirit of the times points, or to which the nature of our civil constitution leads. The full opportunity that is given for the voice of the people being at all times heard, the freedom of discussion on all political matters that is allowed both in discourse and writing, is a sufficient guard against all approaches to unwarrantable stretches of power in the ruler, and to unlimited submission in the subject. SERM. VI.

But while we duly value this high advantage of the liberty of the press and the freedom of political discussion, and when we behold it perpetually acting as a censorial check on all who are in power, let us beware, lest, abusing our liberty, we suffer it to degenerate

* Rom. xiii. 1—6.

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SERM. VI. into licentiouſneſs. The multitude, we well know, are always prone to find fault with thoſe who are ſet over them, and to arraign their conduct; and too often this ſpirit appears when public dangers ought to ſilence the voice of diſcontent, and to unite every heart and hand in the common cauſe.—The management of a great empire, eſpecially in difficult times, is the conduct of an unwieldy and intricate machine, in directing the movements of which, where is the hand ſo ſteady as never to err? Inſtead of the violent cenſures which the giddy and preſumptuous are ſo ready to pour forth, moderation in diſcuſſing matters of which they are very incompetent judges, would be much more wiſe and becoming. The art of government and legiſlation is undoubtedly the moſt nice and difficult of all the arts in which the human mind can be engaged; and where the greateſt preparation of knowledge, experience, and ability are abſolutely requiſite to qualify men for the taſk. But in times when legiſlation is conſidered

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considered as a trade which every man is qualified to take up; when the manufacturer quits his loom, and the artisan lays down his tools, in order to contrive plans for reforming the state, and to constitute societies for carrying his plans into execution; what can be expected to follow from such a spirit, if it were to become prevalent, but the most direful confusion?——Were the rashness of some, whose intentions are innocent, the only evil to be dreaded, the danger would be less. But it is always to be apprehended that the operations of such persons are directed by men who have deeper designs in view; who seek to embroil the state in order to bring forward themselves; whose aim it is to rise to eminence, though it were on the ruins of public tranquillity and order. Let such men, if any such there be, consider well what the consequences may be of fomenting the spirit of presumptuous innovation. It is a dangerous weapon which they attempt to wield. By the agitation which they raise among a blind multitude, they are giving impulse to the motions

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SERM. VI. motions of a violent engine, which often discharges its explosions on the heads of those who first touched its springs.

Upon the whole, let us, my brethren, be thankful that our grounds of discontent, whether founded on real or imaginary grievances, are so few; and that for so great a number of public blessings, we have reason to bless the God of Heaven. We live in a land of pure religion, of liberty, and laws, and under a just and mild government. However the opinions of men may differ about this or that political measure adopted by government, it may with confidence be said, that we have much reason to respect those rulers, under whose administration the empire, though engaged in a hazardous and expensive war, has all along continued to hold a high rank among the nations of Europe, and has attained to that flourishing state of commerce, opulence and safety, in which we behold it at this day: insomuch that perhaps the greatest dangers we have to apprehend,

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hend, arise from the jealousy with which rival nations behold our superiority at sea, and our wealth and strength at home.—Let our prayers ascend frequently to Heaven for the continuance of those blessings; for *the peace of Jerusalem*; *for peace within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces*; and let the admonition of scripture never be forgotten; *My son, fear thou God*; *honour the king*; *and meddle not with them that are given to change**. SERM. VI.

* Prov. xxiv. 21. 1 Peter, ii. 17.

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SERMON VII.

On a Contented Mind.

2 KINGS, iv. 13.

Say now unto her, "Behold thou haſt been "careful for us with all this care; "what is to be done for thee? Wouldſt "thou be ſpoken for to the King, or to "the Captain of the Hoſt?" And ſhe anſwered, "I dwell among mine own "people."

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A PIOUS and reſpectable woman of Shunem had exerciſed great hoſpitality to the prophet Eliſha. In order to accommodate him in his various journeyings, ſhe had cauſed a chamber to be built for him, adjacent to her houſe, where he might be furniſhed with

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with all that, according to the simplicity of those times, was wanted for his entertainment. In the text, the prophet, by his servant Gehazi, acknowledges the obligations he lay under to this good woman for her care and attention; and being at that time in favour with the king of Israel, desires to know, whether, in return for her kindness, he should apply to the king, or the captain of the host, in her behalf, and procure advancement to her in rank and fortune. Her answer bespeaks all the modesty of one who was satisfied and contented with her present lot. Without any affectation of uncommon virtue, or any haughty contempt of the prophet's offers, she mildly replies, "*I dwell among mine own people.*" "I dwell in the condition to which I was born; in my native land; among my original connections, and persons of my own rank; and living there in peace, I have no desires of aspiring to a higher rank."

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The temper of this worthy Shunamite, who could so properly set bounds to

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to her desires, and enjoy her present condition with contentment, is what I now propose to your imitation. It stands in opposition to that restless and discontented spirit which so often sets men at variance with their condition in the world, makes them look with contempt on that state of life and sphere of action which Providence has allotted them; and encouraging every real or supposed discouragement to prey upon their minds, makes them pine for some change of fortune.

It is proper, however, to observe, that this moderation of spirit which I am now recommending, is not inconsistent with our having a sense of what is uneasy or distressing in our lot, and endeavouring, by fair means, to render our condition more agreeable. Entire apathy, or passive indifference to all the circumstances of our external state, is required by no precept of religion. What a virtuous degree of contentment requires and supposes, is, that with a mind free from repining anxiety, we make the best of our condition, whatever

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whatever it is; enjoying such good things as God is pleased to bestow upon us, with a thankful and cheerful heart; without envy at those who appear more prosperous than us; without any attempt to alter our condition by unfair means; and without any murmuring against the Providence of Heaven.—— "In that state in which it pleased God "to place me at my birth, I am ready "to remain, as long as it shall be his "pleasure to continue me there. He "has placed me among my equals. "Such comforts as he saw meet for "me to possess, he has bestowed. "These I shall study to improve, and "by his kind Providence favouring my "industry and application, I may hope "they will be increased. In the mean "time, I rest satisfied; and complain "not. *I dwell among mine own people.*"

But if this acquiescence in our condition is to be considered as belonging to that contentment which religion requires, what becomes, it will be said, of that laudable ambition, which has prompted many boldly to aspire with honour and success far beyond their original

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SER. VII. original ſtate of life?—I readily admit, that on ſome among the ſons of men, ſuch high talents are beſtowed, as mark them out by the hand of God for ſuperiour elevation; by riſing to which, many, both in ancient and modern times, have had the opportunity of diſtinguiſhing themſelves as benefactors to their country and to mankind. But theſe are only a few ſcattered ſtars that ſhine in a wide hemiſphere; ſuch rare examples afford no model for general conduct.—It is not to perſons of this deſcription that I now ſpeak. I addreſs myſelf to the multitude; to the great body of men in all the various walks of ordinary life. Them I warn of the danger of being miſled, by vanity and ſelf-conceit, to think themſelves deſerving of a much higher ſtation than they poſſeſs. I warn them, not to nouriſh aſpiring deſires for objects beyond their power of attaining, or capacity of enjoying; and thereby to render themſelves unhappy in their preſent condition, and diſſatisfied with all that belongs to it.—By this reſtleſs diſcontented temper, I ſhall proceed to ſhew

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shew that they incur much guilt, and involve themselves in great folly and misery.

First, discontent carries in its nature much guilt and sin. With this consideration I begin, because I am afraid that discontent is commonly treated, in a religious view, more slightly than it deserves. A contented temper, we are apt to say, is a great happiness to those who have it; and a discontented one, we call an unlucky turn of mind; as if we were speaking of a good or bad constitution of body, of something that depended not at all on ourselves, but was merely the gift of Nature.——Ought this to be the sentiment, either of a reasonable man, or a Christian; of one who knows himself to be endowed with powers for governing his own spirit, or who believes in God and in a world to come? What, I beseech you, do all the risings of discontent within you import, but so much concealed rebellion against the government of that supreme Being, who hath appointed your place in the world?

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SER. VII. M. world? When you repine at your ſtate, as below what you deſerved, do you not inwardly tax Him with injuſtice and partiality, for conferring his favours on others more unworthy of them, and leaving you neglected and humbled? By treating with contempt the bleſſings he allows to your ſtate, do you not, in effect, tell him that his bleſſings are not worthy of being enjoyed, and merit no thanks, becauſe he does not give you more?——The outward expreſſions of ſuch ſentiments, you may ſuppreſs. You may affect to appear religious, by ſhows of reverence and homage; but ſuch appearances deceive not God. Every habitually diſcontented perſon is, and muſt be, ill-affected towards Him: nay, though he would wiſh to conceal it from himſelf, he is a ſecret blaſphemer of the Almighty.

Beſides impiety, diſcontent carries along with it, as its inſeparable concomitants, ſeveral other ſinful paſſions. It implies pride; or an unreaſonable eſtimation of our own merit, in compariſon with others. It implies covetouſneſs,

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ouſneſs, or an inordinate deſire for the advantages of external fortune, as the only real goods. It implies, and always engenders, envy, or ill-nature, and hatred towards all whom we ſee riſing above us in the world. Dare we treat that as a ſlight infirmity, or a conſtitutional weakneſs merely, which imports ſome of the worſt diſpoſitions and paſſions of the human heart?—— The diſcontented man is never found without a great ſhare of malignity. His ſpleen irritates and ſours his temper, and leads him to diſcharge its venom on all with whom he ſtands connected. He can act his part well, in no relation of life. In public affairs, and in private buſineſs, he is always given to fretfulneſs and complaint. While the man of contented mind, eaſy and happy in himſelf, is diſpoſed for living well with others, and ſpreads around him that cheerfulneſs which he poſſeſſes; the reſtleſs diſcontented perſon is always a troubler of the world; neither a good friend, nor a good neighbour, nor a good ſubject or citizen.

SERM. VII.

In

SERM. VII. In the second place, as this disposition infers much sin, so it argues great folly, and involves men in many miseries. If there be any first principle of wisdom, it is undoubtedly this: the distresses that are removeable, endeavour to remove; those which cannot be removed, bear with as little disquiet as you can: in every situation of life there are comforts; find them out and enjoy them. But this maxim, in all its parts, is disregarded by the man of discontent. He is employed in aggravating his own evils; while he neglects all his own comforts.——What is it to you, though others are supposed to be happier? Very possibly they are not so; for wide is the difference between being what the world calls prosperous, and being happy. You see no more than the imposing outside of glittering fortune; while, under that gaudy cover, there may be lurking many a bitter sorrow.—But supposing others to be in truth as happy as they seem to be, is there any reason, except mere viciousness of disposition, why their happiness should be a cause

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cauſe of your diſcontent and miſery? Cannot you be at your eaſe in the ſhade, becauſe others are baſking in the ſun? What is this but the unhappy art of extracting from objects that ought to be indifferent to you, materials for your own torment? SERM. VII.

"Such reaſonings as theſe," ſays one, "may be ſpecious and plauſible; but "what avail reaſonings to ſet me at eaſe, "who every day feel myſelf hurt and "ſore from the ſcorn of thoſe above me; "who am condemned to behold them "ſhining in all the pomp and ſplendour "of life; while I, through the injuſ-"tice of the world, am left in obſcuri-"ty to toil for a ſcanty ſubſiſtence?" ——Accuſe not the world, my brother. Imagine not, that it is entirely the injuſtice of the world which produces your unhappineſs. The diſeaſe lies within yourſelf. It originates from your pride and ſelf-conceit, joined with the falſe opinions you have allowed yourſelf to entertain of the diſtinctions of fortune. Thoſe diſtinctions muſt take place in every eſtabliſhed ſociety. There muſt be inequality of ranks;

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SERM. VII. and of courſe a diverſity of outward appearance among men. But it is in the outward appearance that the diverſity lies, far more than in what is intrinſic to happineſs and well-being. ——You *dwell among your own people.* In that rank where Providence had placed you, you are living among your friends and equals; and purſuing that train of life to which you have been bred. But you are eager and reſtleſs, till from this quiet obſcurity you can riſe to ſome higher elevation, to which you fancy yourſelf entitled.—Are you aware of the dangers and troubles that would await you there? Suppoſing you to be in ſome degree ſucceſsful, yet, with your new rank of life would not new burdens begin to oppreſs you, and new and unknown cares to vex you? How many rivals would you have to encounter? how many ſlanderers to decry you? how many enemies to combine in oppoſing you? What mortification would you endure on every diſappointment you met with? and on every ſmall ſtep of advancement, what envy would ſtill remain in

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in looking up to those who continued above you? till at last, tired with the vexations of competition, you should be forced to regret the day when discontent drove you away from *dwelling among your own people.*——Awake then, in time, from the dreams of ambition and vanity. Instead of aspiring beyond your proper level, bring down your mind to your state; lest, by aiming too high, you spend your life in a train of fruitless pursuits, and bring yourself at last to a state of entire insignificance and contempt. SERM. VII.

Let it be farther considered, in order to show the folly of a discontented temper, that the more it is indulged, it disqualifies you the more from being freed from the grounds of your discontent. First, you have reason to apprehend that it will turn the displeasure of God against you, and make him your enemy. For what have you to expect from that Providence towards which you are so sullen and unthankful; from that God, whose perfections you injure by your repining and accusing

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SERM. VII. thoughts? How much is it in his power to render you ten times more unhappy than you are at preſent, by taking away thoſe remaining comforts, which, by your contempt of them, you ſhow yourſelf unworthy to enjoy?——Next, by your ſpleen and diſcontent, you are certain of bringing yourſelf into variance with the world as well as with God. Such a temper is likely to create enemies; it can procure you no friends. Proud, jealous, and diſſatisfied with thoſe around you, you will, in return, be avoided, diſliked, and looked upon by them with an evil eye; the diſcouragements from the world, of which you complain, will daily increaſe; while the humble, the cheerful, and contented, will, on every occaſion, get before you, and attract the goodwill of all who can aſſiſt them.

SUCH being the miſchiefs, ſuch the guilt and the folly of indulging a diſcontented ſpirit, I ſhall now ſuggeſt ſome conſiderations which may aſſiſt us in checking it, and in reconciling our minds

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to the ſtate in which it has pleaſed Pro- SERM. VII.
vidence to place us. Let us, for this purpoſe, attend to three great objects; to God, to ourſelves, and to the world around us.

Firſt, Let us ſpeak of God, of his perfections, and government of the world; from which, to every perſon of reflection who believes in God at all, there cannot but ariſe ſome cure to the diſcontents and griefs of the heart. For had it been left to ourſelves what to deviſe or wiſh, in order to ſecure peace to us in every ſtate, what could we have invented ſo effectual as the aſſurance of being under the government of an Almighty Ruler, whoſe conduct to his creatures can have no other object but their good and welfare?——Above all, and independent of all, He can have no temptation to injuſtice or partiality. Neither jealouſy nor envy can dwell with the Supreme Being. He is a rival to none, he is an enemy to none, except to ſuch as, by rebellion againſt his laws, ſeek enmity with him. He is equally above envying the greateſt,

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SERM. VII. greateſt, or deſpiſing the meaneſt, of his ſubjects.—His diſpenſations, it is true, are often dark and unaccountable to us; but we know the reaſon of this to be, that we ſee only a part of them, and are not yet able to comprehend the whole. This we well know, that we ourſelves are often the very worſt judges of what is good or ill for us in this life. We graſp at the preſent, without due regard to conſequences; and whether theſe conſequences are to carry the advantages we had promiſed ourſelves, or be pregnant with future evils, is what we cannot foreſee. Experience has taught us a thouſand times, that God judges better for us, than we judge for ourſelves. Often have we ſeen that what we conſidered at the time as a ſore diſappointment, has proved in the iſſue to be a merciful providence; and that, if what we once eagerly wiſhed for had been obtained, it would have been ſo far from making us happy, that it would have produced our ruin.—The reflexion of Solomon, *who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which*

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which he ſpendeth as a ſhadow ?* ſhould SERM. VII.
often occur to every one who is given to diſcontent. Placed as we are, in the midſt of ſo much ignorance with reſpect to the means of happineſs, and at the ſame time under the government of a wiſe and gracious Being, who alone is able to effect our happineſs, acquieſcence in his diſpoſal of our lot, is the only diſpoſition that becomes us as rational creatures. To fret and repine at every diſappointment of our wiſhes, is to diſcover the temper of froward children, not of men, far leſs of chriſtians. Chriſtians amidſt all their grievances, have ever theſe promiſes to comfort them; that if they *caſt their care upon God, he will care for them*; that out of evil, he bringeth forth good; nay, that at laſt *he ſhall make all things work together for good to them who love him.*

In the ſecond place, in order to correct diſcontent, let us attend to ourſelves and

* Eccleſ. vi. 12.

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SERM. VII. our own ſtate. Let us conſider two things there; how little we deſerve, and how much we enjoy. As to deſerving, in the ſight of God, the Great Diſpoſer of our lot, we know that we have no claim. We are all ſinners; who are ſo far from having a title to challenge favours as our due, that we muſt acknowlege it to be of God's mercies that we are not conſumed. As to deſerving from the world, we are apt indeed ſometimes to make high and unreaſonable pretenſions; yet, ſurely, very conceited we muſt be, if we be not diſpoſed to admit, that there are many of at leaſt equal merit with us, whoſe condition in the world is no better, perhaps much worſe than ours; who yet make no complaints, whoſe diſcontents are not heard. How much ſplendid genius is buried in forgotten neglect and obſcurity? How much real worth and merit is driven forth to ſuffer all the hardſhips of a ſtormy life, while we *dwell among our own people?*——Look into your ſtate, my brethren, and, before you give vent to peeviſhneſs, make a fair and juſt eſtimate of

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of all the bleſſings you enjoy, in com- SERM. VII.
pariſon with others. You would willingly, I know, exchange your condition, in part, with many. You would gladly have the wealth of this man; you would have the high reputation and honour of another; the health perhaps, and firm vigour of a third. But I aſk, Who is there with whom you would wiſh to make a total exchange? to forego altogether your preſent ſelf; and to be juſt what he is, in mind, and in body, as well as in outward eſtate? If this be an exchange, which few, I apprehend, are willing to make, does not this argue, that each man, on the whole, is ſufficiently pleaſed with himſelf; that there are, in every ſituation, certain comforts, and certain grounds of ſelf-complacency and ſatisfaction, which ought in reaſon to be employed as remedies againſt diſcontent?

In the laſt place, conſider the ſtate of the world around you.—You are not happy. You *dwell*, you admit *among your own people*. But there, ſay you, "How

SERM. VII. "How many vexations do I occaſi-
"onally experience? Sometimes diſ-
"treſſed for want of health; ſome-
"times diſappointed in my plans, and
"ſtraitened in my circumſtances; at
"other times, afflicted with domeſtic
"troubles: ſo that I am far from be-
"ing as I would wiſh to be."——
Pray, my brother, who is there that lives in every reſpect juſt as he would wiſh to live? Firſt, find out ſuch a perſon; look through all conditions and ranks, and try if you can diſcover one who will tell you that he has no complaint or uneaſineſs whatever, before you allow yourſelf to repine at your preſent ſituation. Do you preſume to indulge diſcontent, merely becauſe you are included in the common lot; becauſe you are not exempted from bearing your ſhare of the common burden? What is human life to all, but a mixture of ſome ſcattered joys and pleaſures, with various cares and troubles?

You have, perhaps, ſet your heart on ſome one thing, which, if you could attain it, you inſiſt, would put an end to

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to all your complaints, and give you full contentment.—Vain man! will no experience teach you wiſdom? Have not you had the ſame opinion before this, of ſome other object of your deſire; and did you not find that you was deceived in the enjoyment? Will you not then at laſt be perſuaded that *all which cometh*, like all that is paſt, *is vanity?*——Vanity, believe it, is the indelible character imprinted on all human things. As far as happineſs is to be found on earth, you muſt look for it, not in the world or the things of the world, but within yourſelves, in your temper, and your heart. Let the world change into one form or another as it will, it will be a vain world to the end; and you, to the end, will be diſcontented. It cannot give you what you ſeek. *The ſea ſaith, it is not in me; and the earth ſaith, it is not in me. Silver and gold are to no purpoſe weighed for the price of it.* The decree of the Almighty hath paſt, and cannot be reverſed, that man ſhould find his true contentment, under every condition, only in a good conſcience and a well-regulated

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regulated mind, in a holy life, and the hope of Heaven.——You call yourſelf a Chriſtian. Does not that name import that you conſider yourſelf as a pilgrim and a paſſenger on earth; related in your expectations and hopes to a better world? Are you not aſhamed to betray, by your diſcontent, a ſpirit ſo inconſiſtent with ſuch hopes and expectations, and at the time when you profeſs to be looking towards the end of your journey, to ſhow ſo much uneaſineſs about all the little circumſtances of accommodation by the way?——Live by faith, my brethren, and you will live above this world and its diſcouragements. Dwell with God, and with things divine and immortal, and you ſhall dwell with true wiſdom. You will find nothing ſo great in worldly events, as either to elate or deject you. Reſting upon a principle ſuperiour to the world, you will poſſeſs your ſpirits in peace, and will learn that great leſſon of heavenly philoſophy, *in whatever ſtate you are, therewith to be content.*

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SERMON VIII.

On drawing near to God.

[Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

It is good for me to draw near to God.

IN this pſalm the pious author deſcribes himſelf as ſuffering a great conflict within his mind. His obſervation of the courſe of Providence, did not preſent to him ſuch an order of things as was to have been expected from the juſtice and goodneſs of Heaven. The wicked appeared flouriſhing and triumphant, while the worthy were deſtitute and oppreſſed; and much diſorder

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diſorder and darkneſs ſeemed to prevail in the courſe of human affairs. Hence his mind fluctuated for a while amidſt doubts and fears. His truſt in the divine adminiſtration was even ſo far ſhaken as to create a ſuſpicion, that in *vain he had cleanſed his heart, and waſhed his hands in innocency:* till at laſt he *went into the ſanctuary of God,* and was there taught to view the ſtate of human things in a juſter and truer light. He then ſaw the vanity of that earthly proſperity which bad men appear to enjoy; and the happy iſſue of all things at the laſt to the pious and good. He ſaw the divine preſence ever ſurrounding them, and though with inviſible guidance, yet with unerring hand, bringing them, in the end, to glory. His mind returned to tranquillity; and, ſtruck with compunction for his paſt errors, he roſe into thoſe high and memorable expreſſions of devotion, which we find in the verſes preceding the text. *Thou ſhalt guide me with thy counſel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I deſire*

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desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart SERM. VIII.
faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. His fixed principle and resolution, upon the whole, he declares in the words of the text, *It is Good for me to draw near to God*; words which will immediately occur to you as particularly suited to the solemn service in which we are to be engaged this day. In discoursing from them, I shall endeavour to show what is implied in *drawing near to God*; and what reason we have, to agree with the Psalmist in judging this to be *good for us.*

To *draw near to God*, is an expression of awful and mysterious import; in explaining which, we have much reason to be sober and modest, and to guard with care against every enthusiastic excess; remembering always, that rise as high as we can, an immeasurable and infinite distance must ever remain between us and the Supreme Being. There are two senses in which we may be said to *draw near*, in such a degree as mortality admits,

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to God; either by the general courſe of a pious and virtuous life; or in ſolemn acts of immediate devotion.

I. By the practice of holineſs and virtue throughout the general tenor of life, we may be ſaid to *draw near to God*; for it is ſuch an approach as we can make to the reſemblance of his moral perfections. After the image of God, man was created. That image was defaced by our ſin and apoſtacy. By a return to God and our duty, that image, through the intervention of our Saviour, is renewed upon the ſoul; man is ſaid to be regenerated or born again, and is in ſome degree reſtored to that connexion with God which bleſſed his primæval ſtate. He who lives in the exerciſe of good affections, and in the regular diſcharge of the offices of virtue and piety, maintains, as far as his infirmity allows, conformity with the nature of that perfect Being, whoſe benevolence, whoſe purity and rectitude, are conſpicuous, both in his works and his ways.—Worldly and corrupt

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corrupt men, on the contrary, estrange themselves from all that is divine. They degrade their nature by unworthy pursuits, and are perpetually sinking in the scale of being. By sensuality, they descend to the rank of the brute creation; by malignity, envy, and other bad passions, they connect themselves with devils and infernal spirits. Hence they are said in Scripture, to be *alienated from the life of God*; to be *without God in the world*. Though in one sense, God is ever near them, as he surrounds and encompasses them on all hands; yet, in a spiritual sense, they are farther removed from him than any distance of place can separate bodies from one another.——Whereas a virtuous man, whose pleasure it is to do good, and his study to preserve himself upright and pure, is in the course of constant approach towards celestial nature. He is the lover of order, the follower of that righteousness of which God is the author and inspirer. He accords with the great laws of the universe, and seconds the designs of its Almighty

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Governour. He is, if we may ſo ſpeak, in uniſon with God. Hence piety and virtue are deſcribed in Scripture as friendſhip with God, as introducing us into his family, and rendering us *members of his houſehold.* Strong expreſſions are uſed on this ſubject by the ſacred writers. A good man is ſaid *to dwell in God, and God in him.** *If a man love me,* ſays our Lord, *he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come, and make our abode with him*†.

Theſe high and magnificent views of religion, as an approach to God, may eaſily ſatisfy us how much it muſt be *good for us to draw near to God,* in this ſenſe of the expreſſion. It is viſibly the honour and dignity of man to reſemble his Creator; and ſurely his chief happineſs will be ever found to lie, where his higheſt dignity and honour are found. *With God is the fountain of life.* With him reſide complete beatitude and perfection; and from him are derived all the

* 1 John, iii, 24.—iv. 13. † John, xiv. 23.

portions

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portions of happineſs and comfort, which are any where to be found among the creatures he has made. In exact proportion, therefore, as they approach to, or deviate from him, muſt the happineſs or miſery of all rational creatures be. As light and heat flow from the ſun as their centre, ſo bliſs and joy flow from the Deity; and as with our diſtance from that glorious luminary, darkneſs and cold increaſe; ſo, according as by alienation of nature we are removed from God, ruin and miſery advance in the ſame degree upon the ſoul.

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Now conſider, my brethren, that there is one or other courſe which you muſt purſue. If it be not your ſtudy to *draw near to God* by a religious and virtuous life, be aſſured that you are departing from him; for there is no middle courſe between ſin and righteouſneſs; and let every thinking being ſeriouſly reflect what is included in this ſtate of being far from God, and cut off from every kindly influence that deſcends from heaven. With ſhadows of pleaſure, perſons in this unhappy ſituation may be

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SERM. VIII. surrounded and amused; but shadows only, and not realities, they must be, as long as men have no connection with Him who is the origin of all good. Can the stream continue to flow when it is cut off from the fountain? Can the branch flourish when torn away from the stock which gave it nourishment? No more can dependent spirits be happy, when parted from all union with the Father of Spirits and the Fountain of Happiness.

A good man, who is always endeavouring to draw near to God, lives under the smiles of the Almighty. He knows that he is under the protection of that God towards whom he aspires. He can look up to him with pleasing hope; and trust that he shall receive illumination and aid in his progress to perfection. His virtues may as yet be imperfect, and attended with many failings; but his approach towards God is begun. The steps by which he draws near to him may be slow; but that progress is commenced, which in a future state shall be more successfully carried on, and which shall

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ſhall continue to advance through all eternity. *They go on*, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *from ſtrength to ſtrength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion**. Hence, by a very beautiful and inſtructive metaphor, the *path of the juſt*, is deſcribed in Scripture to be *as the ſhining light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day*†. It is the dawn of a glorious morning, which increaſes by degrees to meridian ſplendour; and as the morning dawn, though dim and feeble, is nevertheleſs a ray of the ſame light which forms the brightneſs of noon-day we are hereby taught to conceive, that the piety and virtue of good men now, is a degree of celeſtial nature already imparted to their ſouls, and differs from its perfection in a higher world, only as the twilight is inferior to noon. The path of the wicked man, is directly the reverſe of all this. Degraded by his vices, he is conſtantly declining more and more in a downward courſe. His path, inſtead of being as the ſhining

* Pſ. lxxxiv. 7. † Prov. iv. 18.

light,

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SERM. VIII. light, is the dusk of evening begun: that darkness of the infernal regions to which his nature is tending, increases upon him gradually, till the shadows of night close upon his head at last, with endless and impenetrable gloom.—Thus fully is verified what the Psalmist had asserted in the verse preceding the text, *Lo! they that are far from thee shall perish*; while his own fixed sentiment he immediately declares—*but it is good for me to draw near to God.*——I proceed

II. To consider the other sense in which we may be said to draw near to God; that is, in acts of immediate devotion.

There are two ways by which these contribute to bring us near to God. The first is, by their strengthening in the soul that power of vital godliness and virtue, in which consists our chief resemblance to God: for it is never to be forgotten that all our devotional exercises are subservient to this great end. Herein consists their whole virtue and efficacy, that they purify and improve the soul, raise it above low passions, and thereby

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thereby promote the elevation of the human nature towards the divine. When they are considered merely as external services which we are obliged to perform, but to which we address ourselves with cold and backward hearts; or when the glow of affection which they excite is merely momentary and soon forgotten, they cannot be held to have any influence in bringing us near to God. It is only when they are the service of the heart, when they are the genuine voice of the soul to God, when they serve to kindle those sacred aspirations which continue to breath through out the rest of life, that they assist us in rising towards heaven, and alliance with God. SERM. VIII.

When our acts of devotion are of this nature, they form the other sense in which the words of the text are to be understood. We therein *draw near to God*, as we enter into the most immediate intercourse with him, which the nature of our state admits. In one sense, we cannot be said to be nearer to God at any one time than another; as at all times his presence equally surrounds us; in

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in the fields, as in the temple; in the midst of the world, as much as in the retirement of the closet. But when with serious and devout affections we address ourselves to God, in prayer, and praise, and solemn worship, we then bring home that divine presence to our feelings, and formally place ourselves in it. We may then be truly said to *draw near to God*; approaching to him through a great Mediator and Intercessor; sending up those prayers to which we are encouraged to believe that the Almighty is lending a gracious ear; resigning ourselves to his conduct, and offering up our souls to him; exercising, in short, all those acts of faith, love, and trust, which become dependent creatures towards their Sovereign and Father.

This intellectual correspondence of the heart which our Maker and Redeemer, is termed, in the language of divines, communion with God. And, if there be truth in religion at all; if a Supreme Being exist, who is in any degree accessible to his creatures, and who is gracious

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gracious to the good, it must be admitted to have a foundation in reason and truth. There must be just ground to think, that the worship of pure and holy hearts is acceptable to him; and the gospel gives us full reason to believe, that the energy of his spirit is concerned in stirring up within them the sentiments of devotion. SERM. VIII.

At the same time it is incumbent on me to warn you, that the satisfaction which on such occasions we feel, must not be grounded merely on a belief which we allow ourselves to entertain, of some communication which we had received directly from God. In the warm and transporting moments of devotion, there is always a hazard of our mistaking the exalted efforts of our own imagination, for supernatural impressions from Heaven. It is much safer to judge of the acceptance of our services, by an inference which we can warrantably draw from the state of our hearts and life, compared to God's written word. *To the law and the testimony* we must always have recourse in judging of our state; and then only the

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SERM. VIII. the *teſtimony of God's ſpirit witneſſeth with our ſpirits* that we are the children of God, when we can diſcern in ourſelves thoſe declared *fruits of the Spirit*, which are *love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs, temperance**.

Carrying along with us this caution, it will be found that on many accounts, it will be *good for us to draw near to God* in exerciſes of ſolemn devotion.

Firſt, it is evidently *good for us*, to diſcharge thoſe duties of worſhip, and to give proof of thoſe pious affections, which are unqueſtionably due from us to our Heavenly Father. If we be wanting in theſe, we are clearly deficient in one eſſential part of religion. Morality without piety, conſtitutes a very imperfect character. It is neither ſtable in its foundation, nor univerſal in its influence; and gives us no ground to look for the rewards of thoſe, whoſe *prayers, together with their alms, come up in memorial before God.*

* Galat. v. 22.

But,

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But, beſides the obligations from duty which we are laid under to ſuch religious exerciſes, it can clearly be ſhewn that they are in themſelves good for us, on account of the improvement, the ſatisfaction, and comfort, they enable us to enjoy, in a devout elevation of the heart towards God and celeſtial objects. SERM. VIII.

When we reflect on the languor that attends the ordinary circulations of the little occupations of life; on the inſipidity of many of its amuſements; and the depreſſion of ſpirits that follows after them; we cannot but be ſenſible that occaſional intercourſe with God and divine things, muſt furniſh a comfortable relief to the mind. It is not, indeed; an intercourſe for which we are at all times equal; but neither was the human mind formed to grovel at all times among low cares and objects. It has a demand for ſomething higher and greater, than what the common round of the world affords. Hence the extravagant and eccentric purſuits into which we ſometimes deviate. We attempt ſome higher bliſs, than what we

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we find here. But the attempt which is made by folly, can only be successfully executed by a wise and good man, in the elevation of his soul towards God. Some, indeed, are sunk so low in worldly gratifications, that nothing has any relish with them, but what either breathes the air of giddy dissipation, or tastes of the impure stream of sensual pleasure. But this vitiated taste, contracted by long corrupt habits, is unnatural in itself, and by proper discipline can be corrected and reformed. Let the mind be restored to its natural state, and its relish for what is more great and noble, will return.

Besides the imperfection and emptiness of the ordinary pleasures of the world, many pains and distresses are always mingled with them. No more effectual relief from them can be found, than that which may be enjoyed in drawing near to God. Passions corrode the mind. Cares and anxieties fester in it. We are fretted by the ingratitude of friends; soured by the calumnies of enemies; harassed with the competition of rivals. The very bustle and agitation

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agitation of the world, wear out and oppreſs the mind that longs for tranquillity. In religious retirement, and in thoſe exerciſes of devotion that bring us near to God, we attain a pleaſing region of calm and repoſe. There, worldly paſſions are ſilent; worldly cares are huſhed and forgotten. The mind retires as within itſelf; and remains alone with God. It is only as afar off that the noiſe and diſturbance of the world is heard, like the ſound of a diſtant tumult. SERM. VIII.

By the perplexity of our worldly concerns, we may have been involved in trouble. By the death of our deareſt friends, we may have been overwhelmed with ſorrow. By the ſituation of public affairs, we may be alarmed with dangers that threaten our country. In all ſuch ſituations, is there any conſolation equal to that which the devout man enjoys in drawing near to God? He looks up to a Father and a Friend, in whom he can place his truſt in every time of need. He hears a voice iſſuing from the divine ſanctuary, which ſays, *Call upon me*

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SERM. VIII. *me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee. Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.* Comforted by such words, his mind regains tranquillity. Resting on the hope that the God whom he serves will never forsake him, he can dismiss from his thoughts the fears, the troubles, and wickedness of men, and compose his spirit to dwell among celestial things. Looking up to that blessed world where he expects to find his repose, he beholds no objects but what he can contemplate with delight, as great, peaceful, and serene. There, he beholds none of the agitations and turmoils of men; no tumults, nor factions, nor wars; no friends, who die and leave us; no ambitious men, who aspire to oppress; nor violent men, who attempt to destroy; nor fraudulent brethren, who, with a smiling countenance, cheat and deceive. In perfect contrast to the confusion of the earth, he beholds all things above, proceeding in the same perfect order with the heavenly bodies, which move in their orbs with smooth and steady course. He sees the river of life

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life flowing continually from before the throne of God; and diffusing among the blessed inhabitants, *fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.* SERM. VIII.

' From such devout contemplations and hopes, arose that great delight which holy men of antient times describe themselves to have felt in drawing near to God, and which they have expressed in language so vivid and glowing. *Blessed, O Lord, is the man whom thou chooseſt, and causeſt to approach unto thee; that he may dwell in thy courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, and of thy holy place.— O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips will praise thee. I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Whom have I in heaven, but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire, besides thee**. When such

* Ps. lxiii. 3—6. Ps. lxv. 4. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

language

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SERM. VIII.

language as this expreſſes the native ſentiments of our hearts, we join ourſelves in ſome meaſure to the angelical choir above, and anticipate the employments of the bleſſed.

Some may perhaps imagine, that what has been ſaid of the importance and the advantages of *drawing near to God*, approaches, in ſome degree to myſticiſm and enthuſiaſm. I admit, that if religion were repreſented as conſiſting wholly of internal and devout emotions, the repreſentation of it would be imperfect and falſe. It is deſigned to be an active principle, regulating the conduct of life, and exerting itſelf in good works. But very ignorant he muſt be of human nature, who perceives not, that in order to produce ſuch effects, it is of high importance to engage the affections and the heart on the ſide of virtue. It is not by reaſonings addreſſed ſolely to the underſtanding, that men's characters are formed, or their general conduct actuated. If you wiſh to work any conſiderable effect on their life, you muſt

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you must bring over the affections and inclinations to your side. You must not only shew them what is right and true, but make them feel what is desirable and good. If you attempt to make religion so very calm and rational, as to exclude from it all warmth of sentiment, all affectionate and devotional feelings, you will leave it in possession of small influence on conduct. *My son, give me thy heart*, is the voice of God; and the voice of reason is, that according as the heart is affected and disposed, such will be the general character and conduct. SERM. VIII.

The application of the whole subject to the holy sacrament which we are now to celebrate, is natural and obvious. No more solemn opportunity can be afforded us of drawing near to God, than what we there enjoy. All that is encouraging and comforting in Christian faith is set before us, in this most effectual proof of God's mercy to mankind, giving up his son to the death as a sacrifice for our sins. In celebrating the memorial of this great event, we are

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SERM. VIII. placed as under the immediate brightneſs of heavenly light, and under the warmeſt ray of divine love. If there be *any conſolation in Chriſt, any fellowſhip of the Spirit*, any pleaſing hope of eternal life and joy, it ought on ſuch an occaſion to be drawn forth, and deeply felt. Let us endeavour to kindle, at the altar of the Lord, that ſacred fire, which ſhall continue to diffuſe its vivifying influence over our hearts, when we go abroad into the world, and mingle again in the ordinary concerns of life. We are now to *draw near to God.* Let us draw near to him as our Father; but with that reverence and humility which becomes us on approaching to a Father *who is in Heaven.* Let us draw near through that great Mediator, by whoſe merits and interceſſion alone our ſervices find acceptance at the divine throne. *No man cometh unto the Father but through him; and none who cometh unto God by him, will be caſt out.*

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SERMON IX.

On WISDOM in RELIGIOUS CONDUCT.

PSALM ci. 2.

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.

SERM. IX.

WISDOM, says Solomon, *excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkneſs**. In our preſent ſtate, there is no ſituation in which we can, conſiſtently with ſafety to ourſelves, act thoughtleſsly, and at random. In whatever enterpriſe we engage, conſideration and prudent thought are requiſite to bring it to a good iſſue. On every occaſion, there is a right and a wrong in conduct; there is one line of action which is likely to terminate

* Eccleſ. ii. 13.

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according as we wiſh; and another which, for certain, will land us in diſappointment. If, in the ordinary tranſactions of life, we cannot proſper without a due exerciſe of wiſdom and prudence, a higher degree of it is certainly neceſſary in thoſe momentous parts of conduct which regard our everlaſting welfare.

It is indeed confeſſed, that in religious conduct the fundamental and moſt important article is ſincerity of heart, and goodneſs of intention. At the ſame time, let the intentions, be ever ſo pure and ſincere, they will be in hazard of falling into ſome wrong direction, unleſs they be properly guided by wiſdom. Too many inſtances have appeared, of perſons, who, ſetting out in life with fair and virtuous purpoſes, have been ſo far bewildered by miſtaken forms of goodneſs, as to be betrayed, firſt into errors, and then into vices and crimes. In order to act our parts with propriety and ſteadineſs, there muſt be a due proportion of light in the underſtanding, as well as of warmth and goodneſs in the heart. The Pſalmiſt

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Pſalmiſt was ſenſible of this when he declares in the text his reſolution, of not only *walking in a perfect*, or upright, *way*, but of *behaving himſelf wiſely* in that perfect way. Of the wiſdom or prudence which is neceſſary to guide and ſupport virtue, I purpoſe to treat in this diſcourſe. I ſhall adventure, with great plainneſs and ſimplicity of language, to propoſe ſome practical rules and directions for that purpoſe; which may be of ſervice to perſons, who, with good diſpoſitions and intentions, are beginning the career of life; and which may, perhaps, deſerve attention from perſons in every period of age.——I begin by obſerving,

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I. That it is moſt neceſſary to lay down principles on which we are to form our general conduct. If we ſet out without principles of any kind, there can be no regular plan of life, nor any firmneſs in conduct. No perſon can know where they are to find us; nor on what behaviour of ours they are to depend. If the principles which we pitch upon for determinning our courſe

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SERM. IX. course, be of a variable nature; such, for instance, as popular opinion, reputation, or worldly interest; as these are often shifting and changing, they can impart no steadiness or consistency to conduct. Other principles there are, which some affect to adopt, founded on a sense of honour, on the beauty and excellency of virtue, and the dignity of human nature. But however fair these may be in appearance, they will be found ineffectual in many trying situations; unable to repress the violence of contending passions, or to support the heart under many discouragements and sorrows.

The only sure principles we can lay down for regulating our conduct, must be founded on the Christian religion, taken in its whole compass; not confined to the exercises of devotion, nor to the mere morality of social behaviour; but extending to the whole direction of our conduct towards God and towards man. The foundation is to be laid in faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world, through whose merits only we can look for final acceptance with

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with God. We muſt evince the ſin- SERM. IX.
cerity of our faith by good works; that is, by a faithful diſcharge of all the duties incumbent upon us in our ſeveral ſtations of life: continually looking up to divine grace for aſſiſtance in the part aſſigned us to act; and truſting to that recompence of our preſent labours, which is promiſed to the virtuous in a future and better world.—Suppoſing, that having laid the foundation in ſuch principles, we ſet forth to act a worthy and virtuous part; reſolved, that whatever may befal us, *till we die, we will not remove our integrity from us; that our hearts ſhall not reproach us ſo long as we live**. I proceed to adviſe,

II. That we begin with reforming whatever has been wrong in our former behaviour. This counſel is the more important, becauſe too many, in their endeavours towards reformation, begin with attempting ſome of the higheſt virtues,

* Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

aſpiring

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aſpiring to the moſt ſublime performances of devotion, while they ſuffer their former accuſtomed evil habits to remain juſt as they were. This, I apprehend, is beginning at the wrong end. We muſt firſt, as the prophet has exhorted, *put away the evil of our doings from before God's eyes*; we muſt *ceaſe to do evil, before we learn to do well**. All attempts at reformation of manners are vain, where this is not ſtudied. Let us remember, that as long as the weeds and tares are allowed to remain in the ground, the ſoil is vitiated by their roots ſpreading deep and wide; and no good grain will have room to ſpring up.—— Every man who inſpects his own character, may learn that there are certain failings, to which, from conſtitution, circumſtances, or long habit, he is prone; termed in Scripture the *ſins that moſt eaſily beſet us*. To diſcover theſe, muſt be his firſt care; and his firſt purpoſe, if he in truth wiſhes to be come a good man, muſt be gradually to

* Iſaiah, i. 16.

and

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check, and finally to extirpate them, of whatever nature they are; whether, perhaps, habits of intemperance, unlawful indulgences of pleaſure, indirect methods of acquiring gain, or propenſions to malice, reſentment, or envy. To overcome thoſe evils when they have become inveterate, to pluck up thoſe thorns by the roots, is perhaps the moſt difficult part of reformation, and therefore what we are generally the moſt backward to undertake. At the ſame time it is certain, that as long as, by this tender indulgence to favourite vices, men remain in a divided ſtate between good reſolutions and evil habits, they are ſo far from behaving *wiſely in a perfect away*, that they can ſcarcely be accounted to have entered on that *perfect way*; irreſolution will be ſpread over their conduct, and incoherence will mark their character.—In order to facilitate ſo neceſſary a ſtep in the progreſs towards virtue, let me adviſe you, SERM. IX.

III. To ſhut up, as much as poſſible, the avenues which lead to the return of former

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SERM. IX. former evil habits. Here is required that exerciſe of vigilance, ſelf-diſtruſt, and ſelf-denial, which is ſo often recommended to us in ſcripture. There is always ſome one ſide on which each of us is more vulnerable than on another. There are places, there are times, there are circumſtances, which every man who knows any thing of himſelf at all, muſt know will prove the occaſions of calling forth his latent frailties, and bringing him into ſome fatal ſnare. Then ought that caution of the apoſtle to ſound in his ears; *Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall**. Let him not only *walk circumſpectly*, but rather altogether fly the dangerous ground; aware of the viper which lurks, under the graſs, ready to ſting. But preſumption to flatter ourſelves, and to think that we are able to withſtand every danger, is a weakneſs inherent in man. It is on a moderate and humble eſtimation of our abilities, that wiſdom directs us to for our conduct. As

* 1 Corinth. x. 12.

in

in civil and political life, he who believes himself equal to every task, and on all occasions comes forward with rash audacity, is likely to meet with many a humiliation and repulse; so, in moral behaviour, he who, trusting to the strength of his virtuous resolutions, exposes himself inconsiderately to every occasion of temptation, is sure of being often betrayed into evil. SERM. IX.

All the various and dangerous avenues to vice, with which, in great cities especially, modern life abounds, it cannot be expected that I am here to point out. Wealth, luxury, and idleness, are the great nourishers of every frailty; the great fomenters of every bad inclination and passion. To the children of Idleness, the haunts of Dissipation open many a wide and inviting gate by night and by day. When within those gates they carelessly enter, surrounded with loose companions, how often does it happen, that from the halls of pleasure and houses of gaming, they come forth, as from caverns of destruction, overwhelmed with losses and miseries, and pining with bitter remorse?—

Much

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SERM. IX.

Much does it concern every one who ſeeks to *walk wiſely in a perfect way*, to be particularly guarded in the choice of his aſſociates and companions. How often among the gay and the giddy will he meet with thoſe who ſmile an betray! *He only who walketh with wiſe men, ſhall be wiſe: while the companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed**. Obſerve the attention which, in the verſes immediately following the text, King David declares himſelf to have given to this rule of conduct; *I will ſet no wicked thing before mine eyes; I will not know a wicked perſon. Mine eyes ſhall be on the faithful of the land. He that worketh deceit, ſhall not dwell within my houſe. He that telleth lies, ſhall not tarry in my preſence.* Such was the wiſdom that aſſiſted him to continue in a perfect way.—This wiſdom requires farther,

IV. THAT conſiſtency and uniformity be preſerved in character; that not by pieces and corners only we ſtudy goodneſs, but that we carry one line

* Prov. xiii. 20.

through

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of regular virtue through our whole conduct. Without this extenſive regulation of behaviour, we can never hold on ſucceſsfully in a perfect way. Almoſt all men, even the looſe and profligate, lay claim to ſome one virtue or other, and value themſelves on ſome good moral diſpoſition, which they boaſt of poſſeſſing. It is in vain, therefore, that we reſt our character on one or a few eſtimable qualities, which we imagine ourſelves to poſſeſs in a high degree, while in other points of virtue we are relaxed and deficient. True virtue muſt form one complete and entire ſyſtem. All its parts are connected; piety with morality, charity with juſtice, benevolence with temperance and fortitude. If any of theſe parts be wanting, the fabric becomes disjointed; the adverſe parts of character correſpond not to each other, nor form into one whole. It is only when we *have reſpect unto all God's commandments*, as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, that we have reaſon *not to be aſhamed*.

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The apology for many of thoſe breaches of conſiſtency is always at hand,

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SERM. IX. hand, that the transgression is small, and can easily be repaired on a future occasion; and small sins, we imagine, may be compensated by great and distinguished virtues. But no seduction is more dangerous, than this distinction which men are so ready to make between great and small sins. Nothing is more difficult, than to draw the line of this distinction with any warrantable precision. Wherever inclination gives a strong bias to any indulgence, we may be assured that we shall be always misled in measuring the quantity of guilt. No sin is to be accounted small, by which the dictate of conscience is counteracted, and its authority is weakened and impaired. It may soon draw consequences after it, which will affect our whole conduct. Supposing the matter of these transgressions to be ever so small in its own nature, yet the moral characters of men become stained and bloated by their frequent accumulations; just as many small ulcers, when allowed to form and spread, will grow by degrees into a great disease.—At the same time, when I thus advise you

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you to ſtudy entire and conſiſtent vir- SERM.
tue, and to guard ſtrictly againſt ſmall IX.
tranſgreſſions, let me warn you,

V. AGAINST unneceſſary auſterity, as forming any part of religious wiſdom. This is the meaning of the precept of Solomon, *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyſelf over wiſe why ſhouldſt thou deſtroy thyſelf**? Too ſtrict and ſcrupulous, indeed, we cannot be in our adherence to what is matter of clear duty. Every dictate of conſcience is to be held ſacred, and to be obeyed without reſerve. But wiſdom requires that we ſtudy to have conſcience properly enlightened with reſpect to what really belongs to duty, or infers ſin. We muſt diſtinguiſh with care the everlaſting commandments of God, from the ſuperſtitious fancies and dictates of men. We muſt never overload conſcience with what is frivolous and unneceſſary, nor exhauſt on trifles, that zeal which ought to be

reſerved

* Eccleſ. vii. 16.

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SERM. IX. reserved for the weightier matters of the law. In all ages, it has been the great characteristic of false pretenders to piety and religion, to arrogate to themselves uncommon sanctity, by affected strictness and severity of manners; paying tithes, like the Pharisees of old, of mint, anise, and cummin, while they overlook righteousness, judgment, and mercy. That religion which is connected with true wisdom, leads to a very different spirit. It will teach us to be neither rigid in trifles, nor relaxed in essentials; not to aim at impracticable heights, nor to fall below the standard of attainable duty; never to make ostentation of our righteousness, nor to set ourselves up as patterns and standards to others, but to be gentle and unassuming; without harshness in our manners, or severity in our censures, when others depart in some particulars from our mode of thinking on religious subjects.

At the same time, we are to remember that, in order to avoid austerity, it by no means follows that we should run into an unlimited compliance with the manners of others

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others around us. This is a danger to which they are often expoſed, whoſe tempers are mild, and whoſe manners are condeſcending. In that mixed and various intercourſe, which the preſent ſtate of ſociety forces upon us, few things, indeed, are more difficult, than to aſcertain the preciſe degree of compliance with the world which virtue allows. To preſerve a juſt medium between a formal auſterity on the one hand, and that weak and tame facility on the other, which betrays men into many vices, is one of the moſt important and arduous exerciſes of religious wiſdom. A manly ſteadineſs of conduct, is the object which we are always to keep in view; ſtudying to unite gentleneſs of manners with firmneſs of principle, affable behaviour with untainted integrity. SERM. IX.

VI. In order to walk wiſely in a perfect way, it is of importance that we ſtudy propriety in our actions and general behaviour. There are few preciſe rules of conduct that can be applied alike to all men.

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SERM. IX.

In some of the fundamental virtues, indeed, no circumstances can admit the least variation. There are no situations, for instance, in which truth, justice, and humanity, are not required equally from all. But, in a great number of the duties of life, the manner of discharging them must vary, according to the different ages, characters, and fortunes of men. To suit our behaviour to each of these; to judge of the conduct which is most decent and becoming in our situation, is a material part of wisdom. Without this attention to propriety, virtue will lose much of its grace and efficacy; nay, good disposition may degenerate into mere weaknesses and follies. The behaviour, for instance, which would be engaging in youth, is unsuitable to advanced years. What is innocent gaiety in the one, becomes culpable levity in the other; and to assume in youth that authority and dignity to which years only give any title, is impertinent affectation. In like manner, to the different ranks of men in society, there

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there belongs a different ſtrain of man- SERM. IX.
ners. Whatever is either above or below that line of life in which Providence has placed us, hurts every impartial obſerver, and ſuits not the propriety of virtue. What is proper dignity in one ſtation, may, in another, be preſumptuous arrogance; and while ſuitable dependance belongs to thoſe of inferior rank, it ought not to ſink into a degrading ſervility. With a change in the ſituation of our fortunes, our duties obviouſly change. What was commendable frugality in one condition, may become ſordid parſimony as our eſtate riſes; and the generoſity required of the affluent, turns into extravagance and injuſtice when our circumſtances are impaired.—In all thoſe attentions to propriety, ſome regard will, of courſe, be had to the opinions which the world forms of us. No man has a title to deſpiſe altogether what the world thinks, and what it expects from him. But this regard to the ſentiments of others, muſt never go ſo far as to encroach on what a

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SERM. IX. man's own conscience tells him, it is his duty either to do, or to forbear doing. In the scale by which we measure the propriety of our conduct, the opinion of the world must never be the preponderating weight.—Let me recommend,

VII. The observance of order and regularity in the whole of conduct*. This may, at first appearance, seem an article of inferiour importance, and hardly deserving to be ranked among moral duties. But I am persuaded that it is more nearly connected with virtue than many persons imagine; and that it maintains an important place in that wisdom which directs a perfect way. If ever you mean to carry a consistent line of virtue throughout your conduct, you must allot to every transaction its place and its season. Hurry and tumult, disorder and confusion, are both the characteristics of vice and the parents of it. Let your time be regularly

* Vide on this subject, Vol. ii. Sermon I.

distributed,

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distributed, and all your affairs be arranged with propriety, in method and train. Thus, and thus only, can you be masters of yourselves; your time and your life will be your own; and what is serious and important, will not be justled out of its place, by that crowd of inferiour cares, which are for ever pressing on the disorderly, and frustrating the plans which they had formed for the wise and proper regulation of life.—Consider too, that if order be not studied, there can be no prudent œconomy in the management of your fortune and worldly affairs; and œconomy, be assured, is a great guardian of all the private and domestic virtues. When order and œconomy are neglected, you are in hazard of being first involved in distresses, and then inveigled into crimes; whereas, under the direction of regular conduct, both your worldly and your religious concerns will be more in the course of prospering.——I have now only to add,

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VIII.

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SERM. IX.

VIII. THAT we should give attention to all the auxiliary means which religion offers for assisting and guiding us to walk wisely in a perfect way. These open a large field to the care of every good man. We must always remember that virtue is not a plant which will spontaneously grow up and flourish in the human heart. The soil is far from being so favourable to it; many shoots of an adverse nature are ever springing up, and much preparation and culture are required for cherishing the good seed, and raising it to full maturity.—Among the means for this purpose, let me first mention the serious reading of the holy Scripture. That sacred book, as the standard of our belief and practice, claims, on every account, our frequent perusal. In the New Testament, the brightest display of our Lord's energetic example, joined with his simple, affecting, and instructive discourses, illustrated by the writings of his inspired followers; in the Old Testament, the variety of matter, the ardent glow of devotion in some parts, and the mysterious

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myſterious ſublimity of others; all con- SERM. IX.
ſpire to affect the mind with ſerious and ſolemn emotions. Paſſages impreſſed on the memory from thoſe ſacred volumes, have often, from their recurrence, had a happy effect. In our early years, moſt of us were accuſtomed to look with reſpect upon thoſe venerable records; and woe be to them, who, looking back upon the days of their father's houſe, can trample with ſcorn on the memory of thoſe, whoſe pious cares were employed in forming them to good principles, and teaching them to reverence the word of God!—— Let me next recommend a ſerious regard to all the eſtabliſhed means of religious inſtruction; ſuch as, attending regularly the preaching of the word, partaking frequently of the holy ſacrament, and preſerving a ſacred reverence for the Lord's day. Whenever all regard to the Lord's day becomes aboliſhed; when on it we are allowed to mingle without any diſtinction in our common affairs, and even in our ordinary diverſions and amuſements, we may

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SERM. IX. may account this a certain symptom of declining virtue, and of approaching general immorality. We have beheld in a neighbouring kingdom, how fatally it proved the forerunner of an entire dissolution both of moral and civil order in society. Whatever disregard certain modern refiners of morality may attempt to throw on all the instituted means of public religion, assuredly they must, in their lowest view, be considered as the outguards and fences of virtuous conduct; and even in this view, must deserve the esteem and respect of all good men. We know, and are often enough told, that the *form of godliness* may subsist without the *power* of it. But depend upon it, wherever *the form of godliness* is entirely gone, the ruin of its *power* is not far off. Whoever has studied the human mind may soon be satisfied of this truth.

Besides attention to the public means of religious improvement, much will depend on our own private exercises of devotion and serious thought. Prayer, in particular,

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particular, operates to our high advantage, both by the immediate assistance which we may hope it will procure from Him who is the author and inspirer of virtue, and by its native influence in softening, purifying, and exalting the heart. In vain would he attempt to behave himself wisely in a perfect way, who looks not frequently up to God for grace and aid; and who would presumptuously attempt to separate moral virtue from devotion, its natural and original ally. Besides the exercises of religious worship both public and private, seasonable returns of retirement from the world, of calm recollection and serious thought, are most important auxiliaries to virtue. He who is without intermission engaged in the bustle of society and worldly occupation, becomes incapable of exercising that discipline over himself, and giving that attention to his temper and character which virtue requires. *Commune with your own hearts on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord**.

SERM. IX.

* Psalm iv. 4, 5.

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SERM. IX.

By the obſervance of ſuch rules and maxims as have been now pointed out, it may be hoped that, through divine grace, we may be enabled to *behave ourſelves wiſely in a perfect way*, until, in the end, we receive the reward of ſuch behaviour. The wiſdom here ſpoken of as conjoined with virtue, is that *wiſdom from above*, which is appointed by God to enlighten and guide the courſe of integrity. It opens to us that *path of the juſt*, which is now as *the ſhining light*, and which will *ſhine more and more until the perfect day*.

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SERMON X.

On the Immortality of the Soul, and a future State.

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2 CORINTHIANS, v. 1.

For we know, that if our earthly houſe of this tabernacle were diſſolved, we have a building of God, an houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

SERM. X.

THIS paſſage preſe nts to us in one view the nature of our preſent earthly ſtate, and the future object of the Chriſtian's hope. The ſtyle is figurative; but the figures employed are both obvious and expreſſive. The body is repreſented as a houſe inhabited by the ſoul, or the thinking part of man. But it

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SERM. X. it is an *earthly houſe*, a *tabernacle* erected only for paſſing accommodation, and *to be diſſolved*; to which is to ſucceed the future dwelling of the juſt in *a building of God, an houſe not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* Here then are three great objects preſented to our conſideration. Firſt, the nature of our preſent condition. Secondly, that ſucceeding ſtate which is the object of good men's hope. Thirdly, the certain foundation of their hope; *we know*, that if our *earthly houſe be diſſolved, we have a building of God.*

I. THE text gives a full deſcription of our preſent embodied ſtate; as an *earthly houſe*, an *earthly houſe of this tabernacle*, and a tabernacle which is to be *diſſolved.*

We dwell in an *earthly houſe.* Within this cottage of earth is lodged that ſpiritual, immortal ſubſtance into which God breathed the breath of life. So we are elſewhere ſaid in Scripture, to have *our foundation in the duſt*, and to *dwell in houſes of clay.* During its continuance in this humble

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humble abode, the ſoul may be juſtly conſidered as confined and impriſoned. It is reſtrained from the full exertion of its powers by many obſtructions. It can perceive and act only by very imperfect organs. It looks abroad as through the windows of the ſenſes; and beholds truth as *through a glaſs darkly*. It is beſet with a numerous train of temptations to evils which ariſes from bodily appetites. It is obliged to ſympathize with the body in its wants; and is depreſſed with infirmities not its own. For it ſuffers from the frailty of thoſe materials of which its earthly houſe is compacted. It languiſhes and droops, along with the body; is wounded by its pains; and the ſlighteſt diſcompoſure of bodily organs is ſufficient to derange ſome of the higheſt operations of the ſoul. SERM. X.

All theſe circumſtances bear the marks of a fallen and degraded ſtate of human nature. The manſion in which the ſoul is lodged, correſponds ſo little with the powers and capacities of a rational immortal

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SERM. X. mortal ſpirit, as gives us reaſon to think that the ſouls of good men were not deſigned to remain always thus confined. Such a ſtate was calculated for anſwering the ends propoſed by our condition of trial and probation in this life; but was not intended to be laſting and final. Accordingly the Apoſtle, in his deſcription, calls it the earthy houſe *of this tabernacle*; alluding to a wayfaring or ſojourning ſtate, where tabernacles or tents are occaſionally erected for the accommodation of paſſengers. The ſame metaphor is here made uſe of, which is employed in ſeveral other paſſages of Scripture, where we are ſaid to be *ſtrangers and ſojourners on earth before God, as were all our fathers.* This earth may be compared to a wide field ſpread with tents, where troops of pilgrims appear in ſucceſſion and paſs away. They enter for a little into the tents prepared for them; and remain there to undergo their appointed probation. When that is finiſhed, their tents are

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are taken down, and they retire, to make way for others, who come forward in their allotted order. Thus *one generation paſſeth away, and another generation cometh*; and the *earthy houſe* is to all no other than the *houſe of their pilgrimage**. SERM. X.

The *earthly houſe of this tabernacle*, the Apoſtle, proceeding in his deſcription, tells us, is *to be diſſolved*. Cloſe as the union between the ſoul and body now appears to be, it is no more than a temporary union. It ſubſiſts only during the continuance of a tabernacle of duſt, which, by its nature, is tending towards ruin. The *duſt muſt* ſoon *return to the duſt, and the ſpirit to God who gave it*.——The diſſolution of the *earthly houſe of this tabernacle*, is an event full of diſmay to wicked men. Beyond that period they ſee nothing but a dark unknown, which, as far as they can diſcern, is peopled with objects full of terrour; even to the juſt, this diſſolution is a ſerious and awful event. Providence has wiſely appointed, that burden-

* Pſalms cxix. 54.

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SERM. X. ed as our preſent ſtate is, with various ills and frailties, we ſhould, however, be naturally attached to it. Its final cloſe is always attended with ſeveral melancholy ideas.—Thou who now flouriſheſt moſt in health and ſtrength muſt then have thy head laid low. From thy cloſing eyes the light of the ſun ſhall diſappear for ever. That light ſhall contiuue to ſhine, the ſeaſons to return, and the earth to flouriſh; but to thee no more, ſeparated from the dwellings of men, and cut off from all thou wert accuſtomed to love, as though thou hadſt never been.—Such is the fate of man conſidered merely as mortal; as dwelling in an earthly houſe which is about to be diſſolved. The conſolatory corrective of thoſe humbling ideas, the ray that is to diſſipate this gloom, we behold in the ſubſequent part of the text; that when this earthly houſe is diſſolved, there is prepared for the righteous *a building of God, an houſe not made with hands.* But before proceeding to this part of the ſubject, let us pauſe for a little, and make ſome reflections on what has been already ſaid.

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LET the distinction between the soul and the body, which is so clearly marked in the text, be deeply imprinted on our minds. Few things in religion or morals are entitled to make a stronger impression than this distinction; and yet, with the bulk of men, the impression it makes appears to be slight. They seem to think and act as if they consisted of no more than mere flesh and blood, and had no other concerns than what respect their embodied state. If their health be firm, if their senses be gratified, and their appetites indulged, all is well with them. Is not this to forget that the body is no more than an *earthly house* or *tabernacle* of the soul? The soul, that thinking part which they feel within them, and which it is impossible for them to confound with their flesh or their bones, is certainly far nobler than the tenement of clay which it inhabits. The soul is the principle of all life, and knowledge, and action. The body is no more than its instrument, or organ; and as much nobler as is the part which belongs to him who employs an instru-

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SERM. X.

ment, than to the inſtrument which is employed, ſo much is the ſoul of greater dignity than the body. The one is only a frail and periſhable machine; the other ſurvives its ruin, and lives for ever.——During the time that the union continues between thoſe two very different parts of our frame, I by no means ſay that it is incumbent upon us to diſregard all that relates to the body. It is not poſſible, nor though it were poſſible, would it be requiſite or fit, for man to act as if he were pure immaterial ſpirit. This is what the condition and laws of our nature permit not.—But muſt not the greateſt ſenſualiſt admit, that if the ſoul be the chief part of man, it muſt have intereſts of its own, which require to be carefully attended to? Can he imagine that he truly conſults either his intereſt or his pleaſure, if he employs the thinking part of his nature only to ſerve, and to miniſter to the bodily part? Muſt not this infer, not merely a degradation of the ſuperior part, but an entire perverſion of that whole conſtitution of nature which our Maker hath given us?

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us? Be assured, my brethren, that the soul hath a health and a sickness, hath pleasures and pains of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and which have a powerful influence on the happiness or misery of man. He who pays no attention to these, and neglects all care of preserving the health and soundness of his soul, is not only preparing final misery for himself when he shall enter into a disembodied estate, but is laying, even for his present state, the foundation of many a bitter distress. By folly and guilt he is *wounding his spirit*. Its wounds will often bleed when his body appears sound, and will give rise to inward pangs which no animal comforts shall be able to assuage or heal. SERM. X.

When we impress our minds with a sense of this important distinction between the body and the soul, let us not forget, that closely united as they now are in our frame, their union is soon to terminate. *The earthly house of this tabernacle is to be dissolved*; but the soul which inhabits it remains.

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SERM. X. Let us therefore dwell in our earthly houſe with the ſentiments of thoſe who know they are about to diſlodge. The endowments and improvements of the ſoul are the only poſſeſſions on which we can reckon as continuing to be our own. On every poſſeſſion which belongs to our bodily eſtate, we ought to view this inſcription as written by God; "This is an earthly houſe "which is tottering to its fall; This "is a tabernacle which is about to be "taken down."——Let us with pleaſure turn our thoughts towards thoſe higher proſpects that are ſet before us, when this change ſhall have taken place in the human condition; which naturally brings us to the

IId Head of diſcourſe,—the great object of the hope of good men in a ſucceeding ſtate. *The earthly houſe* is contraſted by the Apoſtle with a *building of God*; *an houſe not made with hands*; and *the tabernacle which is to be diſſolved*, with a *houſe eternal in the heavens.*

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The expreſſions here employed to ſignify what is promiſed to the righteous, *a building of God, an houſe not made with hands*, are expreſſions of a myſterious import. They ſuggeſt to us things which we cannot now conceive, far leſs deſcribe. Into that houſe which is above, thoſe habitations of eternity, no living man has entered, to explore them, and to report to us tidings of what he there beheld. A ſacred veil conceals the manſions of glory. But, in general, thoſe expreſſions of the text plainly import that the ſpirits of good men ſhall, upon death, be tranſlated from an imperfect to a glorious ſtate. Whether we explain *the building of God, the houſe not made with hands*, to ſignify the incorruptible bodies which the juſt ſhall animate at the reſurrection, or the habitations of celeſtial glory into which they enter, they are terms which convey ideas of high magnificence and felicity. This earth on which we dwell, is no more than an exteriour region of the great kingdom of God. It is but an entrance, through SERM. X.

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SERM. X. through which, after suitable preparation, we pass into the palace of an Almighty Sovereign. Admitted there, we may hope to behold far greater objects than we now can behold; and to enjoy in perfection those pleasures which we here view from afar, and pursue in vain. Such degrees of pleasure are allowed us at present as our state admits. But a state of trial required that pains should be intermixed with our pleasure, and that infirmity and distress should often be felt. The remains of our fall appear every where in our condition. The ruins of human nature present themselves on all hands. But *when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.* With the fall of the earthly house, all its rotten and corruptible material shall disappear. *It is sown in corruption*, says the Apostle, speaking of the happy change made upon good men at the resurrection, *it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural, it is raised a spiritual body:—for this corruptible*

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*ruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal, put on immortality**.—— Into that *house not made with hands, that building of God*, we have every reason to believe that there will be no room for such guests to intrude as care or sorrow. Nothing can be admitted to enter there, but what contributes to the felicity of those whom the Almighty hath allowed to dwell in his presence, and to *behold his face in righteousness*. SERM. X.

Besides the glory and perfection of this future state, the text suggests its permanency. This house *not made with hands*, is *a house eternal in the heavens*. The tabernacle which we now inhabit, is every moment liable to fall: above, is the fixed mansion, the seat of perpetual rest. Beyond doubt, the certain prospect of death renders every thing inconsiderable which we here possess. Every enjoyment is saddened, when we think of its end approaching. We become sen-

* 1 Corinth. xv. 42—53.

sible

SERM. X. sible that we are always building on sand, never on a rock. Fluctuation and change characterise all that is around us; and at the moment when our attachment to any persons or objects is become the strongest, they are beginning to slide away from our hold. But in the mansions above, alteration and decay are unknown. Every thing there continues in a steady course. No schemes are there begun, and left unfinished; no pleasing connexions just formed, and then broken off. The treasures possessed there shall never be diminished; the friends we enjoy there shall never die, and leave us to mourn. In those celestial regions, shines the sun that never sets; the calm reigns, which is never disturbed; the river of life flows with a stream, which is always unruffled in its course.

Such are the prospects, imperfectly as we can now conceive them, which are set forth to good men in a future world. But how, it may be asked, shall we be satisfied that such prospects are not mere illusions with which our fancy flatters us. Upon what foundations

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tions reſts this mighty edifice of hope, which the Apoſtle here rears up for the conſolation of Chriſtians, and of which he ſpeaks ſo confidently as to ſay, *We know that if our earthly houſe of this tabernacle were diſſolved, we have a building of God?*—To enquire into this was the SERM. X.

IIId propoſed Head of diſcourſe, to which we now proceed. And as the ſubject is in itſelf ſo important, and ſo pleaſing to all good men, I ſhall take a view of the different kinds of evidence, upon which our faith of a happy immortality is grounded.

We muſt obſerve, in the firſt place, that the diſſolution of the earthly tabernacle at death, affords no ground for thinking that the ſoul at the ſame time periſhes, or is extinguiſhed. I begin with this obſervation, becauſe the ſtrongeſt prejudices againſt the ſoul's immortality, ariſe from what is ſometimes found to happen at that period. The ſoul and the body are at preſent united by the cloſeſt ſympathy. When one ſuffers, the other is affected. Both

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SERM. X. Both ſeem to grow up together to the maturity of their powers; and together both ſeem often to decay. Such a ſhock is apparently ſuffered by the ſoul at death, as at firſt view might lead us to ſuſpect that it was ſharing the ſame fate with the body. Notwithſtanding this, there are clear proofs that the body and the ſoul, though at preſent cloſely connected by divine appointment with one another, are, however, ſubſtances of different and diſſimilar natures. Matter, of which the body is compoſed, is a ſubſtance altogether dead and paſſive, and cannot be put in motion without ſome external impulſe. Whereas the ſoul hath within itſelf a principle of motion, activity, and life. Between the laws of matter, and the action of thought, there is ſo little reſemblance, or rather ſo much oppoſition, that mankind in general have agreed in holding the ſoul to be an immaterial ſubſtance; that is, a ſubſtance the nature of which we cannot explain or define further than that it is a ſubſtance quite diſtinct from matter. This being once

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once admitted, it clearly follows, that since thought depends not on matter, from the diſſolution of the material part we have no ground to infer the deſtruction of the thinking part of man. As long as by the ordination of the Creator theſe different ſubſtances remain united, there is no wonder that the one ſhould ſuffer from the diſorder or indiſpoſition of the other. SERM. X.

It is ſo far from following that the ſoul muſt ceaſe to act on the diſſolution of the body, that it ſeems rather to follow, that it will then act in a more perfect manner. In its preſent habitation, it is plainly limited and confined in its operations. When it is let looſe from that earthly houſe, it is brought forth into greater liberty. To illuſtrate this by an inſtance which may be conceived as analogous, let us ſuppoſe a perſon ſhut up in a apartment, where he ſaw light only through ſome ſmall windows. If theſe windows were foul or dimmed, he would ſee leſs; if they were altogether darkened, he could ſee none at all. But were he let out from this confinement into the open

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SERM. X. open air, he would be ſo far from being deprived of ſight, that though at firſt overpowered by a ſudden glare, he would ſoon ſee around him much more completely than before. The ſenſes are as ſo many windows or apertures, through which the ſoul at preſent exerciſes its powers of perception. If the ſenſes are diſordered, the powers of the ſoul will be obſtructed. But once ſeparated from its earthly tenement, the ſoul will then exerciſe its powers without obſtruction; will act with greater liberty, and in a wider ſphere.——I admit this argument only goes as far as to ſhow, that although the body periſh, there remains with the ſoul a capacity for ſeparate exiſtence. Whether that exiſtence ſhall be actually continued to it after death, muſt depend on the will of Him who gave it life, and who certainly at his pleaſure can take that life away. It is neceſſary, therefore, to enquire into what, we have any reaſon to believe, may be the intention of our Creator concerning a future life.

I argue

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I argue then, in the next place, that SERM. X. if the ſoul were to periſh when the body dies, the ſtate of man would be altogether unſuitable to the wiſdom and perfection of the Author of his being. Man would be the only creature that would ſeem to have been made in vain. All the other works of God are contrived to anſwer exactly the purpoſes for which they were made. They are either incapable of knowledge at all; or, they know nothing higher than the ſtate in which they are placed. Their powers are perfectly ſuited and adjuſted to their condition. But it is not ſo with man. He has every appearance of being framed for ſomething higher and greater than what he here attains. He ſees the narrow bounds within which he is here confined; knows and laments all the imperfections of his preſent ſtate. His thirſt for knowledge, his deſires of happineſs, all ſtretch beyond his earthly ſtation. He ſearches in vain for adequate objects to gratify him. His nature is perpetually tending and aſpiring towards the enjoyment of ſome

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SERM. X. some more complete felicity than this world can afford. In the midst of all his searches and aspirations, he is suddenly cut off. He is but of yesterday, and to-morrow is gone. Often in the entrance, often in the bloom of life, when he had just begun to act his part, and to expand his powers, darkness is made to cover him.—Can we believe, that when this period is come, all is finally over with the best and the worthiest of mankind? Endowed with so noble an apparatus of rational powers, taught to form high views and enlarged desires, were they brought forth for no other purposes, than to breathe this gross and impure air for a short space, and then to be cut off from all existence? All his other works, God hath made in *weight, number, and measure*; the hand of the Almighty artificer every where appears. But on man, his chief work here below, he would, upon this supposition, appear to have bestowed no attention; and after having erected a stately palace in this universe, framed with so much magnificence, and decorated with so much beauty,

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beauty, to have introduced man, in the guiſe of a neglected wanderer, to become its inhabitant. SERM. X.

Let us farther conſider the confuſed and promiſcuous diſtribution of good and evil in this life. The enjoyments of the world, ſuch as they are, are far from being always beſtowed on the virtuous and the worthy. On the contrary, the bittereſt portion is often their lot. In the midſt of infirmities, diſeaſes, and ſorrows, they are left to drag their life, while eaſe and affluence are allowed to the ungodly.—I muſt aſk, if ſuch an arrangement of things, owing to the ordination, or, at leaſt, to the permiſſion of Providence, be conſonant to any ideas we can form of the wiſdom and goodneſs of a Supreme Ruler, on the ſuppoſition of there being no future ſtate?—But as ſoon as the immortality of the ſoul, and a ſtate of future retribution are eſtabliſhed, all difficulties vaniſh; the myſtery is unravelled; ſupreme wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs, are diſcovered to be only concealed for a little while behind the curtain. If that curtain were never

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SERM. X.

to be withdrawn, and immortality never to appear, the ways of God would be utterly inexplicable to man. We would be obliged to conclude that either a God did not exiſt; or though he exiſted, that he was not poſſeſſed of ſuch perfections as we now aſcribe to him, if when a worthy and pious man had ſpent his whole life in virtuous deeds, and perhaps had died a martyr to the cauſe of religion and truth; he ſhould, after long and ſevere ſufferings, periſh finally, unrewarded and forgotten; no attention ſhown to him by the Almighty; no *building of God* erected for him; no *houſe eternal* prepared in the Heavens!

THESE reaſonings are much ſtrengthened by the belief that has ever prevailed among all mankind, of the ſoul's immortality. It is not an opinion that took its riſe from the thin ſpun ſpeculations of ſome abſtract philoſophers. Never has any nation been diſcovered on the face of the earth ſo rude and barbarous, that in midſt of their wildeſt ſuperſtitions there was not cheriſhed among them

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them ſome expectation of a ſtate after death, in which the virtuous were to enjoy happineſs. So univerſal a conſent in this belief, affords juſt ground to aſcribe it to ſome innate principle implanted by God in the human breaſt. Had it no foundation in truth, we muſt ſuppoſe that the Creator found it neceſſary, for the purpoſes of his govern nent, to carry on a principle of univerſal deception among his rational ſubjects. Many of the ſtrongeſt paſſions of our nature are made to have a clear reference to the future exiſtence of the ſoul. The love of fame, the ardent concern which ſo often prevails about futurity, all allude to ſomewhat in which men ſuppoſe themſelves to be perſonally concerned, after death. The conſciences, both of the good and the bad, bear witneſs to a world that is to come. Seldom do men leave this world without ſome fears or hopes reſpecting it; ſome ſecret anticipations and preſages of what is hereafter to befal them. SERM. X.

But though the reaſonings which have been adduced to prove the im-

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SERM. X. mortality of the ſoul and a future ſtate, are certainly of great weight, yet reaſonings ſtill they are, and no more; and in every human reaſoning, ſuſpicions may ariſe of ſome fallacy or error. In a point ſo momentous to us, as our exiſtence after death, we never could, with abſolute certainty and full ſatisfaction, have reſted on any evidece except what was confirmed by the declaration of God himſelf.—For many and high bleſſings we are indebted to the Chriſtian revelation; for none more than for its having *brought life and immortality to light.* The revelations made by God to the world in early ages, gave the firſt openings to this great article of faith and hope. In future periods, the light dawned more and more; but it was not until the ſun of righteouſneſs aroſe by the appearance of Chriſt on earth, that the great diſcovery was completed. Then, indeed, were made known the *city of the living God*, the *new Jeruſalem* above, the *manſions* prepared for the *ſpirits of juſt men made perfect.* Nor was a ſtate of future felicity only proclaimed by Chriſt

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Chriſt and his apoſtles to good men, SERM. X.
but was repreſented as purchaſed for them by the death of their Redeemer. *I give*, he was authoriſed to ſay, *unto my ſheep eternal life. In my father's houſe are many manſions. I go to prepare a place for you**. Accordingly, he lay down in the grave; roſe as the *firſt fruits of them that ſlept*; and aſcending into Heaven, entered there within the veil, as the *forerunner* of his followers, to aſſure them of all being friendly and well-diſpoſed towards them in thoſe upper regions. All therefore who live and die in the faith and obedience of Jeſus, are entitled to ſay with the Apoſtle, *we know*; not only we hope and we reaſon, but *we know, that if our earthly houſe of this tabernacle were diſſolved, we have a building of God, an houſe not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.*

THE firſt and moſt natural improvement of all that has been ſaid, is to

* John, x. 28.—xiv. 2.

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SERM. X. produce in our hearts the moſt laſting gratitute, love, and reverence, towards that great benefactor of mankind, who not only hath made known and publiſhed the bleſſings of a future ſtate to the righteous, but by his great undertaking for their redemption hath erected in their behalf the *houſe eternal in the heavens*.——The next improvement we ſhould make, is to conduct our own life and behaviour as becomes thoſe who have an intereſt in this happineſs and this hope. From ſuch perſons aſſuredly is to be expected a pure, correct, and dignified behaviour in every ſituation; not a contempt of the employments, nor a renunciation of all the comforts of their preſent life. Opinions that produce ſuch effects are connected only with the ſpirit of ſuperſtition and falſe religion. But to them it belongs, in midſt of the affairs, enticements, and temptations of the world, to regulate their conduct as becomes the heirs of a divine inheritance; never debaſing themſelves among what is mean, nor defiling themſelves with what is corrupt in the preſent ſtate;

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state; but serving God with that fide- SERM. X.
lity, and behaving to men with that steady magnanimity of virtue, that generous beneficence and humanity, which suits immortal beings, who are aspiring to rise in a future state to the perfection of their nature, in the presence of God.

SERMON

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SERMON XI.

On overcoming Evil with Good.

ROMANS, xii. 21.

Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.

SERM. XI.

IN this world, we all know that we muſt reckon upon a mixture of goods and evils. Some of the evils are owing to the appointment of Providence in this ſtate of trial; many of them are the fruits of our own guilt and miſconduct. The goods and the evils of our ſtate are ſo blended, as often to render the whole of human life a ſtruggle between them. We have to contend both with the evils of fortune, and with the evils of our own depravity;

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vity; and it is only he who can in some measure overcome both, that is to be esteemed the wise, the virtuous, and the happy man. At the same time, amidst the evils of different kinds which assault us, there is a principle of good, derived from Heaven, by which we may hope to acquire strength, and through divine assistance be enabled to overcome the evils of our state. This is the subject of the exhortation in the text, *Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* Taken in its most extensive sense, as respecting the different kinds of evil which we have to overcome, the exhortation may be understood to comprise the three following particulars. In the first place, Be not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. Secondly, Be not overcome by the disasters of the world, so as to sink into despair. Thirdly, Be not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. But in all those cases, *overcome evil with good.* Overcome injuries, by forgiveness. Overcome disasters,

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aſters, by fortitude. Overcome evil examples, by firmneſs of principle.

I. Be not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, ſo as to purſue revenge. It appears from the context, that this was the primary object which the Apoſtle had in his view in this exhortation. He refers to the injuries which the primitive Chriſtians were conſtantly ſuffering from their perſecutors. Inſtead of being ſo much overcome by theſe as to be intent on revenge, his exhortation in the verſes preceding the text is, *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourſelves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, ſaith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirſt, give him drink; for in ſo doing thou ſhalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* But it is not in times only of perſecution and general diſtreſs, that this exhortation is needful. We muſt in every ſtate of ſociety reckon upon meeting

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meeting with unreaſonable men, and encountering their bad uſage. This is one of the evils inſeparable from our preſent ſtate. No ſtation is ſo high, no worth ſo diſtinguiſhed, no innocence ſo inoffenſive, as to ſecure us entirely againſt it. Sometimes the violence of enemies, ſometimes the ingratitude of friends, will ruffle our ſpirits. Where we think that we have merited praiſe, we will be in hazard of meeting reproach. Envy will riſe unprovoked; and calumny, from its ſecret place, will dart its envenomed ſhafts againſt the moſt deſerving. Such is the conſequence of the preſent depravity of our nature, and of the diſordered ſtate in which human affairs lie.——The fondneſs of ſelf-love is always apt to amuſe us with too flattering proſpects of what life is to produce for us, beyond what it produces for others. Hence our impatience and irritation upon every injury we ſuffer; as if ſome new and unheard-of thing had befallen us; and as if we alone were privileged to paſs through the world, untouched by any wrong. Whereas, if

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SERM. XI. if we were disciplined to think of the world, and of the tempers of those around us, as a wise man ought to think, the edge of this impatience would be taken off. When we engage in any undertaking, we ought to say to ourselves, that in the course of it we will have to do, more or less, with selfish, crafty, unprincipled men. These men will naturally act as their evil nature prompts them. They are the thorns and brambles that we must expect to encumber and to gall us in many of the paths of life. We must not hope to *reap grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles.* Wild dogs will naturally bark; and beasts of prey naturally seek to devour.

Now, when thus situated, how are we to act for overcoming the evils we have already endured, or are in hazard of still farther enduring from others? To provide for safety and defence, is unquestionably allowable and wise. But are we also to lay plans for future revenge?—Were this the course to be followed, what would the consequence

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quence be, but to render the life of man a ſtate of conſtant hoſtility, where provocations and reſentments, injuries and retaliations, would ſucceed one another without end; till the world became like a den of wild beaſts, perpetually attacking and devouring one another? No, ſays the Apoſtle, *overcome evil with good.* Diſarm and overcome your enemies, by forgiveneſs and generoſity. This is the principle of *good*, which you are to oppoſe to their *evil.* Teach them thereby, if not to love, at leaſt to honour and reſpect you. While you take proper precautions for preſent ſafety, provide for the future, not by ſtudied plans of revenge, but by fortitude of mind, by prudent behaviour, and ſuperior virtue. Herein you ſhow no unmanly tameneſs or cowardice. Religion means not to ſuppreſs the proper feelings of honour, nor the ſenſe which every man ought to have of dignity of character, and the rights which belong to him. Theſe may be ſupported to the full, without a mean thirſt for revenge, SERM. XI.

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venge, and a fierce desire of returning evil for evil.

By the magnanimity of forgiveness, you gain an important victory in overcoming, not perhaps your enemy, but your own wrathful and violent passions. Whereas he, who in such conjunctures knows no other method of proceeding but that of gratifying resentment, is, in truth, the person who is overcome. For he has put it in the power of his enemy to overthrow his repose, and to gall and embitter his mind. By forgiving and despising injuries, you assume a superiority over your adversary, which he will be obliged to feel. Whereas, if you allow his provocations to blow you up into fierce revenge, you have given him the advantage. You confess yourself hurt and sore. His evil has overcome your good. He has fixed a dart within you, which in vain you endeavour to pull out; and by the attempts you make, you only exasperate and inflame the sore. Seldom is there any punishment which revenge can inflict, more severe than is suffered by him who inflicts

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flicts it. The bitterneſs of ſpirit, the boilings of fierce paſſions, joined with all the black ideas which the cruel plans of revenge excite, produce more acute ſenſations of torment, than any that are occaſioned by bodily pain.—— When bad men have behaved injuriouſly towards us, let us leave them to themſelves, and they will be ſufficiently puniſhed by their own vices. Their wickedneſs is no reaſon why we ſhould render ourſelves unhappy, or afford them the gratification of having it in their power to deprive us of peace.—I ſhall only add farther on this head, that a paſſion for revenge has been always held to be the characteriſtic of a little and mean mind. Never was any man diſtinguiſhed as a hero, or recorded in the annals of hiſtory as a great man, to whom this quality of generous forgiveneſs of evil did not conſpicuouſly belong. We know how eminently it ſhone in the character of Him whom we juſtly venerate as the model of all perfection; whoſe dying breath was employed in apologiſing and praying

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SERM. XI. praying for those who were shedding his blood.

II. Be not overcome by the misfortunes of life, so as to sink into despair. This is another view of that *evil* which we are called upon to *overcome by good*; and is the sense in which *evil* is most generally understood, and is most dreaded by men. Although by inoffensive and blameless behaviour we should escape, in a great degree, from the injuries of bad men; yet, to escape altogether from the stroke of misfortune and distress, is what none of us can expect. In one way or other, in our person, or fortune, or families and friends, it is the doom of all, more or less, to suffer. From what causes this appointment of Providence arises, and to what purposes it is rendered subservient, it belongs not to our subject at present to inquire; the fact is too certain and obvious.——The principle of good which we must oppose to those evils of our lot, and by means of which we may hope to overcome them,

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them, is inward fortitude, grounded on religion and truſt in God; forming that ſtate of mind, which, reſting on itſelf, and the witneſs of a good conſcience, riſes ſuperior to the trials of the world. SERM. XI.

When the ſky begings to lour around thee; when thy gay proſpects begin to diſappear, thy friends to fail, or thy fortune to decline; or when, as years advance, the chief comforts on which thy heart was ſet, and on which thou hadſt conceived thy happineſs to depend, are unexpectedly cut off; ſay not then within thyſelf, "The evil "time has now overtaken me; the "gates of hope are all ſhut; the days "are come wherein I ſhall have no "pleaſure; enjoyment is fled; no-"thing remains for me now, but to "cloſe my days in melancholy, to de-"ſpair, and to die."——This is to be *overcome of evil* indeed. He who thus allows himſelf to ſink under the miſfortunes of life, diſhonours the character of a man, ſtill more that of a chriſtian. He ſhows that whatever plauſible appearances he may at former times

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times have made before the world, at bottom he not only wanted ſtrength and firmneſs of mind, but was deficient alſo in religious faith and principle. For it is impoſſible that he who allows himſelf to be ſo entirely overcome by the evils of the world, can entertain juſt notions of God, and of his government of the world. He hath caſt aſide all reliance on Providence, and ſet at nought the promiſes of the goſpel. He may ſuppreſs all outward expreſſions of impious diſcontent; he may even affect the language of reſignation; but his heart in ſecret will murmur and repine againſt the Lord.

Theſe, therefore, are the occaſions when it particularly behoves us to call to mind all thoſe principles which would aſſiſt us ſo to poſſeſs our minds in patience, as to overcome evil with good.——Recall, my brethren, all the former experience you have had of the goodneſs of the Almighty, and the ground which this affords for truſt and hope in him now. Recall to remembrance all the promiſes he has made to good

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good men; as the words of Him *who changes not*; who *is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent*. Recollect the general tenour of that Providence, whose course it has ever been, since the creation of the world, so to chequer the life of men with unforeseen vicissitudes, as often to make unexpected goods succeed evils; nay, to make them spring from evils. Recollect, that whatever fortune may rob you of, it cannot take away what is most valuable, the peace of a good conscience, the pleasing sense of having acted honourably and done your duty, and the cheering prospect of a happy conclusion to all the trials of life in a better world. Consider, that as long as virtue remains, there are always, even in the most unfavourable situations, some comforts still left open, did we not overlook them. For it is seldom or never that all good things forsake a man at once, and all evils overtake him together. If he is bereaved of some friends whom he tenderly loved, there are others yet remaining to whom he may look for comfort.— SERM. XI.

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If, by infirmity, or old age, he be excluded from the enjoyments of active life, the gratifications which leiſure and repoſe afford, are ſtill left to him. If his fortune be ſhattered, and poverty threaten to beſet him, yet, even in the very ſtraitened circumſtances, many of the ſimple and beſt pleaſures of nature, and many of the ſatisfactions of ſocial life can ſtill be enjoyed. Nay, the mind of a good man can ſtill be a kingdom to itſelf, and though confined in a priſon, or ſtretched on a ſick bed, peaceful and pleaſing thoughts will occaſionally ariſe to him, and fair proſpects of futurity will preſent themſelves to his view.

Aſſiſted by ſuch conſiderations as theſe, let us enliven faith, ſtrengthen patience, and animate hope, till we be enabled to *overcome evil with good*: always looking forward to better days; nouriſhing truſt in the gracious government of the univerſe; and liſtening to Him who hath ſaid of old, and who ſtill ſays to all his ſervants, *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not afraid, for I am thy God. Call upon me in the day of trouble,*

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trouble, and I will anſwer thee; wait on the Lord, be of good courage; and he ſhall ſtrengthen your hearts, all ye that wait upon the Lord. SERM. V.

III. BE not overcome by the evil examples of the world, ſo as to follow them into ſin. This undoubtedly is one of the moſt dangerous evils which good men are called to overcome; and where it is moſt difficult to gain the victory. He who, in the former inſtances that have been mentioned, can *overcome evil with good*; who can generouſly forgive injuries, and magnanimouſly bear up under misfortunes, will be often in hazard of being overcome by evil, under this form. After having maintained his ground againſt many a rough blaſt, he may be in danger of being betrayed by a flattering gale, in the days of his eaſe and proſperity; of being inſenſibly carried down the ſtream by that multitude of evil-doers who ſurround and deceive him. For the character of *the world* too certainly is, that it *lieth in wickedneſs*. Faſhions of vice may change with the times. In one

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age, one set of corrupt habits may prevail; and in another, the passions of men may take a different turn. But, in every age, the multitude of men will be prone to indulge vicious desires.—On the surface of behaviour, vice may be disguised under a plausible and polished appearance, while at bottom there lies the poisoned root of evil.—Pleasure will ever captivate the young and unthinking. Riches and advancement ensnare the more sober and stayed. Attached to their different pursuits, and connecting with them the ideas of wisdom and importance, the multitude will ridicule those who go not along with them, as formal and precise, as raw, uneducated, and ignorant of the world. Assailed by such reproaches, the timid become afraid; the modest are abashed; the complaisant and good-natured submit to their supposed friends. They begin to imagine that the general opinion of the world cannot but have some reason on its side; and, half seduced by persuasion, half compelled by ridicule, they surrender their

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their former convictions, and consent to live as they see others around them living. SERM. XI.

Such are the evils which we must study to overcome by good, if we wish to be esteemed either honourable men, or faithful christians. And how are we to overcome them? *This is the victory*, says the Apostle John, *that overcometh the world, even our faith**. It is the steadiness of firm and rooted principle of belief in God and Christ, of belief in the everlasting importance of religion and virtue; which you are to oppose to the host of evil-doers.—Consider, I beseech you, that no fashions nor opinions of men can affect that unalterable law of God, which rests on the eternal basis of rectitude and truth. Men, if they please, may call evil, good, and good, evil; but as they cannot change the nature of things, their voice gives no sanction to any plan of conduct as right and wise†. So far are you from having any chance of hold-

* 1 John, v. 4.

† See this subject fully discussed in Sermon XIX. of Vol. iv.

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SERM. XI

ing either a wiſe or a ſafe courſe by going along with the multitude, that he who implicitly follows them may be juſtly preſumed to be in the path of error and of danger. For in every age the multitude have enquired ſuperficially, have judged raſhly, and acted inconſiderately. Concurrence with general practice, neither affords juſtification of conduct, nor promiſes impunity in what is evil. The Righteous Lord of all will never ſuffer his laws to be ſubjected to the capricious fancies of his creatures. Tranſgreſſors will neither be ſcreened by their numbers, nor eſcape by being hidden in a crowd.

In times, therefore, when corruption is prevalent, when vice under any of its modes is faſhionable, we are particularly called upon to ſhow that we have within us a *good*, which we can oppoſe to this *evil*; to ſhow that we have fixed principles of our own, which we will ſurrender to no man, but upon which we will act, and will ſtand by them to the laſt. It ought to be no part of our character, that we ſeek to diſtinguiſh

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distinguish ourselves by affected auste- SERM. XI.
rity, and a marked Singularity in fri-
volous and insignificant matters. Our distinction must rest upon a steady adherence to rational religion and the uncontrovertible rules of virtue, when the multitude around us, whether the high or the low, are deviating into licentious and criminal conduct. Depend upon it you may, that even that multitude, though they may attempt to turn you into ridicule, honour you at the bottom of their hearts. They will be compelled to acknowledge, or at least to feel, whether they acknowledge it or not, that your unshaken firmness in what you esteem to be honourable and worthy, must proceed from some principle within, of a higher nature than that from which they act. At any rate, by thus maintaining, in every situation, the cause of religion and truth, and thereby overcoming evil with your good, you shall obtain honour from the great Judge of the earth, and your reward shall be great in Heaven.

THUS,

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THUS, in ſeveral important inſtances, I have ſhown how the exhortation in the text is to be complied with, and in what manner our good ſhould overcome evil; overcoming injuries by generous forgiveneſs; overcoming misfortunes by patience and reſignation; overcoming the temptations of evil examples by ſteady adherence to conſcience and duty. In many of theſe caſes, the conflict we are called to maintain may be arduous and difficult; inclined, as we too often are, by the bent of our nature to the evil ſide. But, if we wiſh and deſire to do well, let us not be diſcouraged, nor deſpair of victory. Weak in ourſelves, we have ground to be *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*— For the principle of good, feeble though it may be at preſent in human nature, is never left unbefriended by God. It is a principle derived from Heaven, and partakes of heavenly efficacy. If it once take root in the ſoul, it will be made to ariſe and grow from ſmall beginnings into gradual maturity, under his protection and

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influence from whom its origin came. To them who have no might, it is written *he increaſeth ſtrength**. The conteſt between ſin and righteouſneſs, which at preſent takes place in the world, is a ſtruggle between God and Belial, between the powers of light and the kingdom of darkneſs; and in this ſtate of things we muſt eaſily diſcern to which ſide the final victory will belong. Let us endeavour to do our duty, and God will be with us. Let us ſincerely ſtudy to overcome evil with good, and we ſhall overcome it. Our feeble powers ſhall be aided by divine might, and our imperfect ſervices crowned with divine rewards. *They that wait upon the Lord ſhall renew their ſtrength; they ſhall mount up with wings as eagles; they ſhall run and not be weary; they ſhall walk, and not faint*†.

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* Iſaiah, xl. 29. † Iſaiah, xl. 31.

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SERMON XII.

On a life of Diſſipation and Pleaſure.

PROVERBS, xiv. 13.

Even in laughter the heart is ſorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heavineſs.

SERM. XII.

PAINS and ſorrows occur ſo frequently in human life, that it is not ſurpriſing that the multitude of men ſhould eagerly court ſcenes of pleaſure and joy. It is natural to ſeek relief from our cares, by whatever promiſes to ſubſtitute hours of gladneſs in the place of anxiety and trouble. But we have much reaſon to beware, leſt a raſh and unwary purſuit of pleaſure defeat its end, leſt the attempt to carry plea-

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ſure too far, tend, in the iſſue to ſink us into miſery. *There is a way*, ſays the wiſe man in the verſe preceding the text, *which ſeemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.* There is a certain courſe of life which a man may have choſen to adopt, as leading to gladneſs and enjoyment; but which he ſhall find at laſt to be deſtructive of his happineſs; for all is not real gladneſs, which has the appearance of being ſuch. *There is a laughter, in the midſt of which the heart is ſorrowful; and a mirth, the end whereof is heavineſs.* SERM. XII.

From ſerious admonitions of this kind given in Scripture, it would be very unjuſt to infer, that religion is an enemy to all mirth and gaiety. It circumſcribes our enjoyments, indeed, within the bounds of temperance; but as far as this ſacred limit permits, it gives free ſcope to all the gratifications of life. It even heightens their reliſh to a virtuous man. It enlivens his cheerfulneſs, and allows him to enjoy with ſatisfaction all that proſperity affords him.

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SERM. XII.

him. The text is applicable only to that ſet of men to whom temperance is no reſtraint; who propoſe to themſelves the unlimited enjoyment of amuſement and pleaſure in all their forms, as the ſole object and buſineſs of life.

Such perſons, too frequently to be met with in the age wherein we live, have utterly miſtaken the nature and condition of man. From the participation of pleaſure, as I juſt now obſerved, he is far from being excluded. But let him remember that a mediocrity only of enjoyment is allowed him, for his portion on earth. He is placed in a world, where, whatever his rank or ſtation be, a certain part is allotted him to act; there are duties which are required of him; there are ſerious cares which muſt employ his mind, how to perform properly the various offices of life, and to fill up the place which belongs to him in ſociety—He who, laying aſide all thoughts and cares of this kind, finding himſelf in the poſſeſſion of eaſy or affluent fortune, and in the bloom

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bloom of life, ſays within himſelf, SERM. XII.
" What have I to do, but to ſeek out
" every pleaſure and amuſement which
" the world can afford me? Let others
" toil in the common walks of life,
" who have to make their fortunes by
" ſober and dull application. But to
" me labour is ſuperfluous, the world
" is open. Wherever amuſement in-
" vites, or pleaſure calls there I go.
" By paſſing my days and nights in
" whatever can entertain my fancy
" or gratify my ſenſes, life ſhall, to
" me be rendered delightful."—He, I ſay, who thinks thus, vainly endeavours to counteract the intention of nature, and the decree of Providence. He attempts to render his ſtate on earth, what it was never deſigned to be. He might as well expect that the phyſical laws of nature ſhould be altered on his account; and that, inſtead of being confined to walk like ordinary men on the ground, he ſhould obtain the privelege of treading on the air, as expect to enjoy a ſtate of perpetual pleaſure, by devoting himſelf to pleaſure wholly,

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and ſetting aſide all the ſerious cares and duties of life. Troubles, he may be well aſſured, are prepared for him, and await him. Where he expected ſatiſfaction, he ſhall meet with diſappointment; and in him ſhall be verified the ſaying in the text, that *even in laughter the heart is ſorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heavineſs.*——But leſt, to perſons of this deſcription, ſuch general reaſoning, from the eſtabliſhed conſtitution of Providence, may not be ſatisfactory, I proceed to ſhow them how clearly it is confirmed by facts. For this purpoſe let us obſerve,

In the firſt place, the obvious conſequences of a life of pleaſure and diſſipation, to health, fortune, and character. To each of theſe, it is an enemy, preciſely according to the degree to which it is carried.—Character is ſoon affected by it. As the man of diſſipation often makes his appearance in public, his courſe is marked, and his character is quickly decided by general opinion, according to the line which he is obſerved to purſue. By frivolity and levity, he

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he dwindles into infignificance. By vi- SERM. XII.
cious exceſſes, or criminal pleaſures, he incurs diſapprobation or contempt. The fair proſpects which his friends had once entertained of him die away, in proportion as his idleneſs or extravagance grows; and the only hope which remains is, that ſome fortunate incident may occur to check his career, and reclaim him to a better mind. In the mean time, the reſpectable and the grave ſmile at his follies, and avoid his company. In the midſt of ſome faſhionable aſſemblies he may ſhine; by ſome of his fellows he may be admired; but in the world he is of no ſignificance or conſequence, any more than the little animals that ſport around him.——Health, the moſt valuable of all temporal bleſſings, is known to be preſerved by temperance and a regular life. But by the men of diſſipation, it is readily ſacrificed at the ſhrine of pleaſure. To years of health and ſoundneſs, they are often ſo fooliſh as to prefer a few hours of ſenſual gratification. Suppoſing that no extravagant exceſſes, or vicious

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vicious pleaſures, cut ſhort their health and life, yet what conſtitution can ſtand the irregular hours, the diſorderly living, the careleſs indulgence, into which the love of pleaſure draws thoſe who devote themſelves to it? Hence the ſhattered and debilitated body, and the premature old age. The native vigour and ſprightlineſs of youth, is melted down by effeminacy and ſenſuality. The ſpirits are weakened and enervated, if not ſunk and loſt for ever.——The ſtate of their fortune may, for a while, enable them to indulge their pleaſures, and to maintain the figure they wiſh to keep up in the world; but let fortune be ever ſo affluent, in the poſſeſſion of ſuch perſons, it is in the high road to decay. For to them, attention to buſineſs, or to the management of their affairs, becomes a burden, which they ſtudiouſly ſhun. Prudent œconomy is diſdained, as a mean attention, belonging only to vulgar and narrow minds. Their habits of licentiouſneſs require unlimited indulgence. The demands of paſſion muſt be immediately ſupplied, whatever

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whatever the consequences be. Hence delivering themselves up to those who can furnish supply for their expence, or who pretend to take charge of their affairs, they become the prey of the crafty, who fatten on their spoils: till at last, in the midst of thoughtless extravagance, and of general waste and fusion, they see nothing remaining to them, but the ruins of a broken fortune. SERM. XII.

Such are some of the miseries attending habits of dissipation, and the intemperate love of pleasure. We see them daily exemplified in the world, throughout all the stages of this character, from the frivolous and the giddy, up to the rake and the profligate; in some stages, only impairing health and fortune; in others, entirely overthrowing them; in their beginnings, casting a shade on the characters of men; in their completion, exposing them to disgrace and misery.—Even abstracting from those ultimate consequences in which irregular pleasures terminate, the gratification which, in the mean time, they bestow, is dearly paid for. A temporary satisfaction

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SERM. XII. it is admitted, they afford. They raiſe the ſpirits to a degree of elevation above their uſual tone, but in that forced elevation they can never long remain; and in proportion to the elevation to which they were raiſed, is the degree of depreſſion to which they ſubſide. Experience has ſhown, that no ſenſual pleaſure, except what is regulated by temperance, can be laſting. Every pleaſure that is carried beyond it, is no more than a momentary exploſion; a tranſient guſh; a torrent that comes down impetuouſly, ſparkling and foaming in its courſe, but that ſoon runs out, and leaves a muddy and polluted channel. Who knows not the languor and dejection that follow every exceſſive indulgence of pleaſure, or a long continuation of amuſement of any kind? From whom do we hear ſuch frequent complaints of low ſpirits, as from thoſe who ſpend moſt of their time in the circles of diſſipation and gaiety, or in the revelry of the world? To what wretched and pernicious reſources are they obliged to fly, in order to recruit their ſpirits, and reſtore

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ſome life to their deadened ſenſations? What melancholy ſpectacles do they at length exhibit of a wornout frame, and an exhauſted mind? So well founded is the aſſertion in the text, that there is *a mirth the end of which is heavineſs.* SERM. XII.

LET us conſider, in the ſecond place, the ruin which a life of pleaſure and diſſipation brings upon the moral ſtate and character of men, as well as on their external condition. This deſerves the more attention, as the purſuit of pleaſure ſometime ſets out at the beginning with a fair and innocent appearance. It promiſes to beſtow ſatisfactions unknown to a duller race of mortals; and, at the ſame time, to allow virtue and honour to remain. With a great part of mankind, eſpecially with thoſe who are moſt likely to run the race of pleaſure, ſuch as are well born, and have been regularly educated, ſome attachment to good principles at firſt is found. They cannot as yet bear the reproach of any thing that is diſhonourable or baſe. Regard to their word, generoſity of

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ſentiment, attachment to their friends, and compaſſion for the unhappy, prevail for a while in their hearts.—But, alas! as the love of pleaſure gains ground, with what inſidious ſteps does it advance towards the abolition of all virtuous principles? It has been ever found, that without the aſſiſtance of reflection, and of ſerious thought, virtue cannot long ſubſiſt in the human mind. But to reflection and ſerious thoughts, the men of diſſipation are ſtrangers. Abſorded, as they are, in the whirpool of faſhionable life, and hurried along by a rapid ſucceſſion of amuſements, reflection is loſt, and good impreſſions gradually decay. Nothing is regarded but preſent enjoyment, and plans of improving on that enjoyment in future. As their taſte, and their acquired habits, carry them into the ſociety of licentious company, they muſt follow the more trained votaries of pleaſure who naturally take the lead. They become aſſimilated to the manners of their looſe aſſociates; and, without perceiving it themſelves, their whole character by degrees is changed.

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changed. Former reſtraints are now laid aſide; and inorder to preſerve the rank of equality with their companions in every expence, prodigality is the neceſſary conſequence. Prodigality preſently opens a way to the worſt vices. They become both covetous and profuſe; profuſe in ſpending but covetous to acquire. In order to carry on the ſplendour of life, and to indulge their inclinations to the full, they now ſubmit to what, at their firſt outſet in life, they would have rejected as mean and baſe. Now is the creditor defrauded; the tenant racked and oppreſſed; the tradeſman fruſtrated of the reward of his honeſt induſtry; and friends and relations, on whom any impreſſion can be made, are plundered without mercy.—In this manner all the bland and ſmiling appearances which mirth and gaiety once carried, are transformed into the blackeſt ſhapes of vice; and from a character originally ſtamped only with giddineſs and levity, ſhoots forth a character compounded of diſhoneſty, injuſtice, oppreſſion, and cruelty.

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Is there any one who will deny, that the intemperate purſuit of pleaſure leads frequently into all the vices now mentioned, and that ſome of them it carries always in its train? I ſhall not dwell on certain crimes, which none but the moſt atrocious devotees of pleaſure will pretend to juſtify, though all who partake of that character make too light of them; ſuch as, the violation of the marriage-bed, the ſeduction of the innocent, and the introduction of miſery into families once happy and flouriſhing. Theſe are crimes that require the interpoſition of the lawgiver and the judge, more than the admonition of the preacher.—Let us only think for a little of that reproach of modern times, that gulph of time and fortune, the paſſion for gaming, which is ſo often the refuge of the idle ſons of pleaſure, and often alſo the laſt reſource of the ruined. To how many bad paſſions, to how many baſe arts, does it give riſe? What violent agitations of the mind, ſometimes burſting into rage and frenzy, does it occaſion? What a

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ſhameful traffick of gain does it form among perſons, whom their rank in life, and their connections in ſociety, ought to have raiſed above the thoughts of enriching themſelves by ſuch diſhonourable means? How many friendſhips has it broken? How many families has it ruined? In what deadly cataſtrophes has it often terminated? The gameſter ſits down at the fatal table with eager ſpirits and mighty hopes. Behold him when he riſes,—a wretch, haggard and forlorn, curſing his fate, and, from deſpair of retrieving his ruined fortune, driven perhaps to entertain the horrid thought of ending his own exiſtence!—Diſmiſſing ſo melancholy a theme, let us,

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In the third place, attend to the diſquieting ſenſations which are apt to intrude upon the men of pleaſure, even in the midſt of their enjoyments. Not only is the *end of their mirth heavineſs*, but *in laughter*, as it is expreſſed in the text, *the heart is ſorrowful*. Often is laughter affected, when the heart is galled within. A ſhow of mirth

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mirth is put on to cover ſome ſecret diſquiet. When you enter into a gay and feſtive aſſembly, you behold every appearance of ſparkling felicity. Alas! could you look into the breaſts of this ſeemingly happy company, how inconſiderable would the proportion be found of thoſe who were truly happy! how great the proportion of thoſe who, either in their minds, were entirely vacant and languid; or who fled to ſcenes of gaiety in order to fly from themſelves, from domeſtic uneaſineſs, or corroding cares, and in the tumult of company and forced mirth, to drown their ſorrows!——At the beſt the flaſhes of joy, which burſt from the diſſipated and careleſs, are of a tranſient and broken kind, interrupted by reflections which they cannot altogether avoid. For at the bottom of the hearts of moſt men, even amidſt an irregular life, there lies a ſecret feeling of propriety, a ſenſe of right and wrong in conduct. This inward ſenſe is frequently ſo much borne down by appetites and paſſions, as to loſe its power of guiding men to

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to what is right, while yet it retains as much influence as to make them ſenſible that they have been doing wrong; that they have not acted that part in life which they ought to have acted, and which their friends, and the world, had a title to expect from them. Though conſcience be not ſtrong enough to guide, it ſtill has ſtrength to dart a ſting.—Together with this conſciouſneſs of ill deſert, there will be at ſometimes joined an humbling ſenſe of their own inſignificancy, when they behold others meeting with eſteem and honour for having acted a manly and worthy part in life. Their ſuperiority they are obliged to acknowledge, and to look up to them with reſpect; while the retroſpect of their own life affords nothing but ſhame, and the bitter remembrance of time they have miſpent, and opportunities they have thrown away.—In the midſt too of mortifying reflections of this kind, it will not be in their power to eſcape altogether from a dread of certain conſequences which are in hazard of be-

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falling from their careleſs conduct. Scarcely is any fortune ſo ſtable as to be beyond the reach of accidents that will diminiſh it. To none ſo readily as to the men of pleaſure, are ſuch accidents likely to happen; and fond as they are of their preſent ſuperb train of living, the dread that it may not be in their power always to continue it, will, in ſpite of all their endeavours to avoid ſuch thoughts, occaſionally force itſelf upon them, and caſt a cloud over many a ſcene of projected merriment.

Can you reckon that to be ſincere joy, which is liable to be interrupted and mingled with ſo many ſenſations of the moſt diſagreeable nature? In the cup of intemperance, or in the tumult of looſe ſociety, the man of pleaſure ſtudies to drown them. But often his efforts are vain. When he puſhes to the utmoſt his ſcenes of criminal revelry, they will carry the reſemblance of Belſhazer's feaſt; at which, while the impious monarch was drinking amongſt his lords and concubines, he beheld the fingers of a man's hand-writing in unknown characters

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characters on the wall over againſt him; *and his countenance changed, and his heart ſunk within him.** Thus, in the midſt of riot, imagined ſpectres have been known to haunt the man of pleaſure. He ſees hands coming forth to write on the wall againſt him. The very portraits of his anceſtors which hang in his hall, appear to him to look with frowning aſpect, and to upbraid him with waſting in licentious pleaſures the fortune which their honourable labours or virtuous induſtry had acquired. Of all the claſſes of ſinners, it has been found, that none are ſo liable, in ſome period of their lives, or at leaſt when life is drawing to its cloſe, to be ſmitten with ſevere remorſe, as thoſe who have ſacrificed to pleaſure all the calls of conſcience and of duty. SERM. XII.

Let us conſider, in the laſt place, how unſuitable a life of diſſipation and pleaſure is to the condition of man in this world, and how injurious to the intereſts

* Daniel, v. 5.

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intereſts of ſociety. In the world, we are ſurrounded with ſcenes of diſtreſs. We behold the greateſt part of the human race doomed to hard labour and penurious ſubſiſtence. We hear the cries of indigence. We know that every day thouſands are yielding up their breath, and thouſands are attending their dying friends. Our own lives are fleeting faſt away. Flouriſhing as our ſtate may at preſent ſeem, we know there is but a ſtep between us and death. The youngeſt and the healthieſt cannot tell whether they may not, within the ſpace of a few days, be called to undergo the judgment of God.——Is this a time, is this a place, where no other thing is to be purſued but giddy amuſement and perpetual pleaſure?—Have you, my friends, who are ſpending your days in this wanton abuſe of proſperity, no ſenſe of the unſuitableneſs of ſuch conduct to the condition of mortal man? Do you ſee nothing in the ſtate of human life to chaſten and temper your mirth; to bring ſerious reflexions home to your boſom; to

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to admoniſh you that it is better to go ſometimes *to the houſe of mourning*, than to dwell always *in the houſe of feaſting?* ——Do you feel no compunction at the thought that, by your luxury and extravagance, you are adding to the ſcenes of ſorrow which already abound in this afflicted world? For you, and your follies, the aged parent, or the reſpectable relation, mourn. To ſupply the oppreſſive demands of your pleaſures, families are driven from their habitations, and left to poverty and want. Your mirth forces the widow and the fatherleſs to weep.—— At the ſame time you are ſcattering poiſon in ſociety around you. You are corrupting the public manners by the life which you lead. You are propagating follies and vices; and by the example which you ſet, are enſnaring many to follow you into ruin.—— Conſider with how much diſcontent and indignation the poorer claſſes of men, all the while, behold you. Eſpecially, if in times of ſcarcity and of war, ſuch as thoſe in which I now write, they ſee you indulging in waſtefulneſs

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waſtfulneſs and thoughtleſs profuſion, when they and their families, are not able to earn their bread. As long as wealth is properly employed, perſons in low ſituation naturally look up to their ſuperiors with reſpect. They reſt contented in their ſtation. They are even diſpoſed to bleſs the hand which furniſhes them with employment on reaſonable terms, and occaſionally diſpenſes ſeaſonable relief. But if they feel themſelves oppreſſed merely that a few may be enabled to ſquander at pleaſure, and to revel in waſteful exceſs, their diſcontents are not eaſily ſuppreſſed. With ſullen murmurs they iſſue from their impoveriſhed habitations, prepared for every evil work.

SUCH are ſome of the conſequences which flow from diſſipation and the intemperate love of pleaſure. Let not the effect of what has been ſaid be fruſtrated by this evaſion, that although the deſcriptions which have been given be juſt and true, yet they are applicable only to ſuch as

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as have carried their purſuit of pleaſure to the moſt criminal exceſs; a claſs, in which few if any, will admit that they deſerve to be ranked.—They who are only beginning the courſe of vicious pleaſure, and who ſin within preſcribed bounds, may reckon with certainty on their bearing a ſhare of the evils and miſeries which I have deſcribed. Not only ſo, but having once entered on an irregular courſe, they cannot tell where they are to ſtop. They have drunk from the cup of the enchantreſs; and being fairly brought within the magic circle, their powers of reflection are laid aſleep, and to make an eſcape may not be in their power. SERM. XII.

To ſome, it may perhaps appear, that the whole ſtrain of this diſcourſe refers only to the rich and the great; and that perſons of moderate fortune, and of the middle ranks of life, who form the great body of ſociety, have little or no concern in it. But this is entirely a miſtake. Splendid fortune, and high birth or rank, afford, beyond doubt, the ſtrongeſt and moſt frequent temptations

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tations to the looſe indulgence of every enjoyment. But throughout all ranks the danger extends of being miſled by pleaſure in ſome of its forms. In this country, where wealth and abundance are ſo much diffuſed over all ſtations; where it is well known that the inferiour orders of men are perpetually preſſing upon thoſe who are above them, and following them in their manners, a life of diſſipation is perhaps not leſs frequent among the middle than among the higher claſſes of ſociety. The modes of amuſement may not be ſo refined. The entertainments and pleaſures may be of a groſſer kind. But in many an inferiour circle, there prevails as much love of pomp and ſhow, as much proportional extravagance in expence, as much rivalry in the competition of paſſions and pleaſures, as in the moſt faſhionable and courtly aſſemblies. Sober reflections are as much laid aſide; the gratification of vanity and the indulgence of pleaſure, are purſued with equal eagerneſs.——Let us therefore, my brethren, in whatever rank of life

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life we are placed, proceed upon this as our great principle, that to ſerve God, to attend to the ſerious cares of life, and to diſcharge faithfully the duties of our ſtation, ought to be the firſt concern of every man who wiſhes to be wiſe and happy; that amuſement and pleaſure are to be conſidered as the relaxation, not the buſineſs, of life; and that if from thoſe ſentiments we depart, and give ourſelves up to pleaſure as our only object, *even in laughter the heart ſhall be ſorrowful, and the end of our mirth ſhall be heavineſs.* SERM. XII.

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SERMON XIII.

On the Conſcience void of Offence.

Acts, xxiv. 16.

Herein do I exerciſe myſelf, to have always a conſcience void of offence toward God and toward men.

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THESE words were ſpoken by the Apoſtle Paul, in the courſe of that manly and ſpirited defence which he made for himſelf, when accuſed of ſedition and impiety before Felix the Roman Governour. He vindicates himſelf from the charges brought againſt him; but boldly avows his principles, conceals no part he had acted, gives up no doctrine he had taught,

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taught, and, with the firm conſciouſ- SERM.
neſs of innocence, appeals to his ene- XIII.
mies themſelves for the unblemiſhed integrity of his life and character.

To maintain *always a conſcience void of offence toward God and toward men*, is a degree of virtue, to which, in its full extent, none can lay claim. For who is there among the ſons of men that can pretend, on every occaſion, throughout his whole life, to have preſerved a faultleſs conduct? How few days indeed, go over our heads wherein ſomething does not paſs, in which our behaviour has not been altogether correct, or free from every offence? In the preſent imbecility and fallen ſtate of human nature, he is the worthieſt perſon who is guilty of the feweſt offences towards God or towards man. But though the character referred to in the text be not attainable by us in a complete degree, it is the character to which we muſt all ſtudy to approach; to come as near to it as the weakneſs of our nature admits; ſo that neither in piety towards God, nor in ſocial duties

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towards men, we may be found remarkably deficient. You will obſerve, that this great Apoſtle does not boaſt of having fully attained to a conſcience void of every offence. His words are, that *herein he exerciſed himſelf*; that is, this was his object and his ſtudy, to this he formed and trained himſelf, to have *always a conſcience void of offence towards God and men*. Aſſuredly, there is nothing in human life more amiable and reſpectable than ſuch a character. Wherever it appears, it commands univerſal reverence in every ſtation, whether high or low. It is indeed what all men would wiſh to gain; at leaſt, they wiſh that others ſhould believe them to poſſeſs it. Even the moſt corrupted look to it, from afar, with a ſigh; and however obliged to condemn themſelves for having fallen ſhort of it, cannot help eſteeming and reſpecting others who are dignified by the attainment of it. Let us then conſider, firſt, what is implied in *exerciſing* or forming ourſelves to maintain the conſcience void of offence; and next, what

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what the effects will be of having, in ſome degree, attained it. SERM. XIII.

I. IN *exerciſing* ourſelves for this purpoſe, our firſt care muſt be to have our conſcience well informed, or properly inſtructed, as to what is, or is not, real ground of offence towards God or towards men. Conſcience is the guide, or the enlightening and directing principle of conduct; and as our Saviour has warned us, *If the light which is in thee be darkneſs, how great will that darkneſs be**? If that which ſhould guide us be itſelf miſled, how widely muſt we wander aſtray?—— There are two extremes here, to each of which, different ſets of men are apt erroneouſly to incline. One ſet of men are apt to be minutely ſcrupulous about matters of ſmaller importance; *tithing*, as the Scripture deſcribes them, *mint, aniſe, and cumin, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law*. Punctual in their obſervance of all the forms and

* Matth. vi. 23.

ceremonies

SERM. XIII. ceremonies of religion, they hope by this means to compenſate for allowing themſelves in unlawful pleaſures or unrighteous gains. Another, and perhaps a more numerous ſet of men, err from looſe caſuiſtry in matters of moral duty. They admit the obligation they are under to virtuous practice; but they lay the whole ſtreſs of virtue on ſome particular good diſpoſitions to which their temper inclines them. On theſe they highly value themſelves; but breaches of other parts of duty, they are apt to conſider as ſmall and venial tranſgreſſions. They have balances of their own, in which they weigh every tranſgreſſion; and if any of the offences they have committed, either againſt God or their neighbour, weigh light in the ſcale of faſhion or general practice, they appear to them as ſcarcely any offences at all. Both theſe extremes we muſt carefully guard againſt; and ſtudy to regulate our conduct by the pure unſophiſticated laws of God; reſting our character neither on a ſtrict obſervance merely of the external forms of religion, nor

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on a partial regard to its moral duties; but attending to all that God has required from us as men and Chriſtians. The truth is, ſuch errors as I have pointed out, always have their ſource in ſome corruption of the heart. It is not from inability to diſcover what they ought to do, that men err in practice. It is from ſome oblique regard to their intereſts or their pleaſures, to their reputation or their gain, that they deviate into by-paths, while they affect to aſſume ſome appearance of principle. Fairneſs and uprightneſs of mind are the chief requiſites for directing our conſcience how to avoid offences towards God or man. He who, with an honeſt intention, ſeeks in every caſe to know what it is his duty to do, will ſeldom or never be at a loſs to diſcover it. SERM. XIII.

In the next place, it belongs to every one who ſtudies to attain to a conſcience void of offence, to make reparation for whatever wrong he is conſcious of having formerly done. This is the moſt difficult, but at the ſame time

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time the moſt ſatisfactory teſt, of our ſincerity in deſiring to have a clear conſcience before God and man. How can he be ſincere in this deſire, who allows himſelf to remain quiet, while loaded with the ſenſe that all he now enjoys has been obtained by injuſtice and fraud? If he continues, without remorſe, to fatten upon the gains of unrighteouſneſs; to feaſt on the ſpoils of the induſtrious; to revel in luxuries purchaſed by oppreſſion or treachery; dare he hold up his face, and utter the name of Conſcience? *Woe to him that buildeth his houſe in unrighteouſneſs, and his chambers by wrong**. In the midſt of his ſtately habitation, *the ſtone*, in the expreſſive language of Scripture, *ſhall cry out of the wall againſt him; and the beam out of the timber ſhall anſwer it*†.—It may not be always in a man's power to make exact reſtitution of every unlawful gain he has acquired; but to make reparation to the utmoſt of his power, for every wrong he has

* Jerem. xxii. 13 † Habak. ii. 11.

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done to others, is the duty of every one who lays any claim to principle or honeſty. If this be entirely neglected, it is the mark of a conſcience that is become dead to all ſenſe of right and wrong. In vain we pretend to clear our conſcience, by affecting to compenſate for fraud or cruelty, either by acts of ſtrict religious homage towards God, or by ſome partial virtues and ſhows of generoſity towards men.—With reſpect to men, we ought to learn that we muſt begin with being juſt, before we can attempt to be generous. With reſpect to God, we know that he delights in *mercy more than ſacrifice*; and rejects with contempt the hypocrtical worſhipper. *I will come near to you in judgment, ſaith the Lord; and I will be a ſwift witneſs againſt thoſe that oppreſs the hireling, the widow, and the fatherleſs; and that turn aſide the ſtranger from his right.—The Lord will plead their cauſe, and ſpoil the ſoul of thoſe that ſpoiled them**.

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* Malachi, iii. 5.

AFTER.

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SERM. XIII. AFTER making reparation for the wrongs he has committed, the next ſtudy of every one who is *exerciſing himſelf to have the conſcience void of offence*, ſhould be to guard againſt thoſe particular ſnares which have formerly led him into evil. If, for inſtance, covetouſneſs has on many occaſions tempted him to defraud or oppreſs, that he might increaſe his worldly ſtore, it ought to be his firſt care to correct in future this inordinate paſſion for wealth, by bringing down in his eſtimation the acquiſitions of fortune to their proper value; ſo that he may remain ſatisfied with a moderate ſhare of the world's goods, and become ſenſible of what ſmall importance great riches are to real happineſs. If ambition has impelled him to riſe into conſideration by crooked policy and intrigues, let him impreſs his mind with all the conſiderations that will ſhow him the emptineſs and vanity of worldly honours. If a looſe and careleſs life has brought him into habits of diſſipation, and led him to neglect thoſe religious duties which he owed to his

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his Maker; let him return to the regular worſhip of God; and nouriſh an awful fear and reverence of that Almighty Being, on whom his all depends in time and eternity.——In this manner it muſt be his care to begin, by eradicating thoſe corruptions which, on different occaſions, have tempted him to violate conſcience. This ſtudy to reform all known errors in former life, will be one of the moſt ſatisfying marks of a ſincere deſign to preſerve in future a conſcience void of offence. For if any of the old vitiated parts of the diſpoſition be allowed to remain in their former ſtate, in vain will any man apply himſelf to a thorough reformation of character. The favourite ruling paſſion, if it be ſuffered to keep its aſcendant, will not fail to drag the life after it. SERM. XIII.

In the laſt place in order to carry on this diſcipline which I have been recommending for obtaining a good conſcience, it will be highly neceſſary, that we frequently examine ourſelves, and bring our conduct under review.

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SERM. XIII. No day ought to paſs over our head, without ſome exerciſe of this kind. Every evening before we go to reſt, we ſhould ſubject to ſcrutiny the tranſactions in which we have been engaged. "What have I done this day, by "which I may either have juſtly of-"fended any man, or have ſhown neg-"lect of God? What duty have I "tranſgreſſed? Wherein have I omit-"ted to act the part which my Maker, "or my fellow-creatures, had a title "to expect from me?"—Be aſſured, my friends, that only by thus preſerving conſcience in the frequent exerciſe of its natural juriſdiction, you can ſupport its rights. If you do not lead it in this manner often to aſſume its due ſtation, its authority will gradually decline. There will be no accuracy in your moral conduct. Corruptions will grow upon you unawares. You will forget that you are creatures accountable for your actions, to a higher tribunal than that of the world.——It is a careleſs train of living, that is the general ruin of mankind. It is not ſo much

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much from having adopted evil princi- SERM. XIII.
ples that men become wicked, as from having adopted no principles at all. They follow their inclinations, without examening whether there be any principles which they ought to form for regulating their conduct. The chief corrective of this miſchief is that which has been ſuggeſted; by bringing conſcience into a frequent exerciſe of its power, and thereby awakening its authority over our life.——Bitterly it may at times reprove us for our ſins and and follies. Sharply it may ſting. But thoſe reproofs and thoſe ſtings are ſalutary in their effect; and tend to prevent us from proceeding headlong in a downward courſe. If ever conſcience become altogether dead and ſtill, the ſymptom is ominous of our having contracted from hardened vice that mortal lethargy, from which we are only to be awakened at the day of judgment.

II. HAVING thus ſuggeſted ſome of the particulars which appear moſt eſſential in *exerciſing* or forming *ourſelves* to

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SERM. XIII. *taining to a conſcience void of offence towards God and men*, I come next to recommend this diſcipline by ſhewing the happy effects it will produce. Theſe happy effects are manifold; to avoid proxility, I ſhall compriſe them under two general heads. Such a clear conſcience ſets us free from the terrors of another world; it exempts us from a multitude of diſquietudes in this.

Firſt, the conſcience void of offence tends to procure freedom from the terrors of another world. Many, I know, in the gaiety of their hearts, pretend to make light of terrors of this kind; yet nothing is more certain, than that they are capable of aſſailing and diſmaying the ſtouteſt heart. Conſcience is too great a power in the nature of man to be altogether ſubdued. It may for a time be repreſſed and kept dormant. But conjunctures there are in human life which awaken it; and when once awakened, it flaſhes on the ſinner's mind with all the horrors of an inviſible Ruler and a future judgment. It has been ſo ordered by Providence,

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vidence, that it is always in the evil day, at the ſeaſon when men ſtand moſt in need of conſolation and ſupport, that conſcience exerts its vengeance on the guilty. I might mention what is ſuffered in the lonely hours of ſolitude and ſilence, when the ſinner's mind is humbled and depreſſed by ſome recent diſgrace, or ſome diſappointment in his criminal purſuits. But let me only lead your thoughts to what muſt await us all, when we we ſhall have arrived at the decline of life; when we feel the hand of death upon us, and cannot any more flatter ourſelves that it will long delay giving the fatal ſtroke. *Sufficient*, and more than ſufficient, *for that day will be the evil thereof*, even ſuppoſing that nothing within ſhall alarm us with dark forebodings of what is to follow. But if at the time when we are oppreſſed with ſickneſs or pain upon our bed, diſtreſſed perhaps with the ſituation of our family and worldly affairs, and juſt about to take the laſt farewell of our friends and of all we have ever loved on earth; if, in the midſt of this

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ſcene of diſtreſs, we ſhall be alſo tormented with the thought of what is to become of us in that next world which is juſt opening to our view; if we depart from life, conſcious that we deſerve puniſhment for the manner in which we have lived; and dreading that the hour of our being to receive that puniſhmet is at hand; ſuch a ſtate of complicated miſery who can endure? *The ſpirit thus wounded* and bleeding, when it is going forth from the body, *who can bear?*

I by no means ſay, that he, who during his life has taken the greateſt care to preſerve his conſcience void of offence, can upon that plea reſt with confidence; or upon this ground alone leave this life without uneaſineſs or fear. No man's conſcience was ever entirely clear from all reproach. We daily offend; and the beſt have much reaſon to implore mercy and forgiveneſs from their Judge. The whole ſtrain of the Goſpel tends to humble and depreſs thoſe who vainly truſt to their own imperfect righteouſneſs. It teaches us that the

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the ultimate ground on which we are to rest for acceptance with God, is the righteousness and merit of our great Redeemer. SERM. XIII.

——But this I say, and testify to you, that the most satisfactory evidence you can possess, of having an interest in the Redeemer's merits, and being finally accepted through him, must arise from the testimony of a conscience, which you have studied to keep *void of offence towards God and towards men.* This will be the best proof of your belonging to the number of the sons of God. It will be the witness of the divine spirit within you; the day-star arising in your hearts, and preparing the approach of a more perfect day. Without the study of attaining a good conscience, be assured, that all other grounds of hope will prove fallacious: not the most fervent zeal, nor the highest presences to intercourse with God, will be of any avail. They will have no more stability than the house built on the sand, which, in the day of trial, falls to the ground. He only whose conscience bears witness to his faithfulness, his integrity, and sincerity, in

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discharging all the duties of life, can, with a steady mind, and a firm but humble trust in his Saviour, look forward to all that awaits him in a future unknown world.

In the next place, while the conscience void of offence thus delivers us, in a great degree, from the terrors of a future life, it keeps us free, at the same time, from innumerable disquietudes in this life. All the offences for which conscience condemns us, become, in one way or other, sources of vexation. Never did any man long forsake the straight and upright path, without having cause to repent of it. Whether it be pleasure, or interest, or ambition, that leads him astray, he is always made to pay dear for any supposed advantage he gains. Warily and cautiously he may at first set out, and lay many restraints on himself against proceeding too far. But having once forsaken conscience as his guide, his passions and inclinations soon take the lead of his conduct, and push him forward rashly. One bad step betrays him into another; till, in the end, he

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he is overtaken, if not by poverty and dis- SERM. XIII.
ease, at least by dishonour and shame, by the loss of friends, and the forfeiture of general esteem. *He who walketh uprightly*, has been always found to *walk surely*; while in the dark and crooked paths of fraud, dishonesty, or ignoble pleasure, a thousand forms of trouble and disaster arise to meet us. In the mean time, to a bad man, conscience will be always an uneasy companion. In the midst of his amusements, it will frequently break in upon him with reproach. At night, when he would go to rest, holding up to him the deeds of the former day, putting him in mind of what he has lost and what he has incurred, it will make him often ashamed, often afraid.——Cowardice and baseness of mind are never failing concomitants of a guilty conscience. He who is haunted by it, dares never stand forth to the world, and appear in his own character. He is reduced to be constantly studying concealment, and living in disguise. He must put on the smiling and open look, when dark designs are brooding in his mind.

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SERM. XIII. Conscious of his own bad purposes, he looks with distrust on all who are around him. and shrinks from the scrutiny of every piercing eye. He sees, or fancies that he sees, suspicion in many a countenance; and reads upbraidings in looks where no upbraiding was meant. Often he *is in great fear, where no fear is.*

Very different from this, is the state of the man whose conscience is void of offence. He is manly and intrepid in every situation. He has never seduced the innocent by guilty arts. He has deluded no one with false promises. He has ensnared no man to trust him by a deceitful account of his affairs; nor taken any advantage of the distresses of others to enrich himself. Without uneasiness he can look every man boldly in the face; and say with the good Prophet Samuel; *Behold, here I am; witness against me. Whose ox have I taken? or, whose ass have I taken? or, whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Of whose hand have I received any bribe? Declare, and I will restore it to you* *. He

* 1 Samuel, xii. 3.

who

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who can thus take God and the world to witneſs for his integrity, may deſpiſe popular accuſation or reproach. Thoſe cenſures and rumours which are conſtantly diſquieting the man of guilty conſcience, paſs by him unheeded. *His witneſs is in heaven; and his record is on high.* Innocence and uprightneſs form a tenfold ſhield, againſt which the darts of the world are aimed in vain. Of neither God as his Judge, nor of men as his companions, is ſuch a man afraid. With no unquiet nor terrifying ſlumbers will his couch be haunted. *I will both lay me down in peace, and ſleep; for the Lord maketh me dwell in ſafety.*

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Let thoſe conſiderations which have been now briefly ſuggeſted, contribute to render the character in the text, *of a conſcience void of offence towards God and man*, amiable and eſtimable in our eyes. If in its fulleſt extent we cannot attain to it, let us at leaſt endeavour to approach to it, and herein with the great Apoſtle *exerciſe ourſelves*. We may reſt aſſured, that the more

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SERM. XIII. more we partake of this character, the happier and more honourable ſhall our life be on earth, and the nearer ſhall it bring us to Heaven. Conſcious of our innumerable frailties, let it be our daily prayer to God, that by his powerful ſpirit he would rectify what is corrupted in our nature; would guard us by his grace againſt the temptations that ſurround us; *keep us from the path of the deſtroyer, and lead us in his way everlaſting.*

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SERMON XIV.

On the Aſcenſion of Chriſt.

[Preached in the evening after the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

LUKE, xxiv. 50, 51.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lift up his hands and bleſſed them: And it came to paſs while he bleſſed them, he was parted from them and carried up into Heaven.

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THE ſacred Scriptures not only ſet before us a complete rule of life, but give weight and authority to the precepts which they deliver, by the information they communicate of certain great and important facts, in which all the human race

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race has a deep concern. Of thoſe facts one of the moſt illuſtrious is the aſcenſion of our Saviour to Heaven, after having completed the work of our redemption. This is a ſubject on which it is at all times pleaſing to a Chriſtian to meditate; but eſpecially after the celebration of that ſolemn ordinance in which we were this day engaged. We there renewed the memorial of our Saviour ſuffering and dying in the cauſe of mankind. Let us now take part in his ſucceeding triumphs. Let us with pleaſure behold him riſing from the grave, as the conqueror of death and hell, and aſcending into Heaven, there to reign in glory, and to act as the protector and guardian of his people, to the end of time——It will be proper to begin with taking a particular view of all the circumſtances that attended this memorable event in the hiſtory of our Saviour's life; as they are related in the text, compared with the accounts of other Evangeliſts. The circumſtances will all be found to be both beautiful and

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and ſublime in themſelves, and inſtructive to us. SERM. XIV.

We are informed, * that it was not until forty days after his reſurrection from the grave, that this event took place. During this ſpace he had *ſhown himſelf alive after his paſſion, by many infallible proofs, being often ſeen by his diſciples, and converſing with them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* All being now concluded which he had to do on earth; the guilt of mankind having been expiated by his death, and his Apoſtles fully inſtructed in the part they were henceforth to act, and the character they were to aſſume; one day, we are told, he *led them out of the city as far as to Bethany.*—With the utmoſt propriety was this place ſelected for the ſcene of his aſcenſion. Near Bethany was the Mount of Olives, to which our Lord was wont ſo often to retire for the exerciſe of private devotion: and there alſo was the garden

* Acts, i. 3.

of

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of Gethſemane, where his ſufferings commenced with that agony in which his *ſoul was exceeding ſorrowful even unto death.* At the ſpot where his generous ſufferings on our account began, there alſo was his glory to commence; and thoſe fields which ſo long had been his favourite retreat, and ſo often had been conſecrated by him to meditation and prayer, were now to be dignified with his laſt and parting ſteps towards heaven; a ſort of ſymbol, of devotion and virtuous ſufferings being ſteps that prepare for aſcent to heaven.—There, we are told, *He lift up his hands, and bleſſed his diſciples; and while he bleſſed them, he was parted from them.* How beautiful is this attitude of our departing Lord! How well did ſuch a concluſion ſuit the reſt of his life! *Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.* While he lived, he *went about doing good:* He died, praying for his enemies; and when he aſcended into heaven, it was in the act of lifting up his hands and bleſſing his friends; like a dying parent giving his laſt

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laſt benediction to his children and family. A worthy pattern is here ſet before us, of the manner in which every good man ſhould wiſh to ſpend his laſt moments, in acts of devotion to God, and expreſſions of kindneſs and affection to his friends.—While our Saviour was thus employed, he was *parted from his diſciples; a cloud*, it is ſaid, *received him out of their ſight**, *and he was carried up into heaven.* Here were no whirlwinds, no thunders, no chariots of fire. Supernatural appearances of old, had been accompanied with majeſty of a terrible kind. The law was given in the midſt of lightnings and thunders. Elijah was caught up into heaven in a fiery chariot. But the Saviour of the world was gently *received up in a cloud;* with that ſort of meek and calm magnificence, which beſpeaks the peaceful genius of the Goſpel and its Author.——Angels likewiſe aſſiſted at this ſolemnity, as in every diſpenſation friendly to mankind theſe benevolent

SERM. XIV.

* Acts, i. 9.

ſpirits

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ſpirits are repreſented as taking part. At the creation of the world, *the morning ſtars*, it is ſaid, *ſang together, and all the ſons of God ſhouted for joy**. At the birth of our Lord, we hear of their ſongs of praiſe and joy; we find them at preſent at his reſurrection from the dead; and now again at his aſcenſion into heaven. *While his diſciples looked ſtedfaſtly towards heaven, as he went up, behold, two men ſtood by them in white apparel; which alſo ſaid, Ye men of Galilee, why ſtand ye gazing up into heaven? This ſame Jeſus which is taken up from you into heaven, ſhall ſo come in like manner as ye have ſeen him go into heaven*†.

SUCH were the circumſtances which accompanied that great and ſignal event of Chriſt's aſcenſion into heaven; all of them very ſolemn and ſtriking, and calculated to leave a deep impreſſion on the minds of his diſciples.—Let us now proceed to conſider the ends and purpoſes of

* Job, xxxviii. 7. † Acts, i. 10, 11.

our

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our Saviour's aſcenſion, as far as they are revealed and made known to us; and, together with them, the effects which ought thereby to be produced on our minds. SERM. XIV.

In the firſt place, by our Saviour's aſcenſion into heaven, it was made to appear that the great deſign for which he deſcended to the earth was completely fulfilled. A ſolemn atteſtation was thus given by God, to the virtue and efficacy of that great ſacrifice which he offered by his death for the ſins of the world: It was declared that, in conſideration of the high merits and generous ſufferings of the Son of God, pardon and grace were to be extended to the fallen race of men. Therefore, *God raiſed him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might ſtand in God.*

Hence, the aſcenſion of our Lord is to be conſidered as a diſplay from heaven of the olive branch to mankind. It is a moſt auguſt ratification of that covenant of grace, on which are founded all our hopes of acceptance

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SERM. XIV. acceptance with God. We lay under the ſentence of condemnation as an offending guilty race, till Chriſt undertook our cauſe, and by his reſurrection and aſcenſion proved that he ſucceeded in what he had undertaken. As ſoon as he was received up into heaven, and ſat down at the right hand of God, the terrors of the law were withdrawn. Antient prophecies were fulfilled, which repreſented the coming of the Meſſiah as the renovation of the world, as the æra of declared grace and peace to mankind. The aſcenſion of Chriſt was the ſignal of his triumph over all the powers of darkneſs. Long they had meditated our ruin, and maintained the reign of idolatry among the nations. But the period was now come when their power was to be overthrown. When Chriſt, as it was predicted of old by the inſpired Pſalmiſt, *aſcended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* He then ſpoiled *principalities and powers**.

* Coloſſ. ii. 15.

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He *deſtroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil* †; and the *gifts* which, as tokens of victory, he beſtowed among his followers, were no leſs than peace, pardon, and eternal life.——While our Lord's aſcenſion thus ſerves to eſtabliſh our faith in the Goſpel, SERM. XIV.

It is, in the next place, to be viewed by us, with reſpect to Chriſt himſelf, as a merited reſtoration to his original felicity. As the Son of God, all glory belonged to him for ever. The divine nature could neither ſuffer any real depreſſion, nor receive any additional advancement. But it was as a man, that he appeared and acted on earth; that he ſuffered and died. What he had done in that character, entitled him, as a man, to the higheſt rewards. Accordingly it is in this view of merited recompence, that his aſcenſion and exaltation at the right hand of God. is always ſet forth in Scripture. Becauſe *he made himſelf of no reputation, and took*

† Heb. ii. 14.

upon

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SERM. XIV. *upon him the form of a ſervant; and being found in faſhion as a man, he humbled himſelf, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the croſs; therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jeſus every knee ſhould bow—and every tongue confeſs that Jeſus Chriſt is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* †.—In this conſtitution of Providence, an illuſtrious teſtimony was deſigned to be given of God's regard and love to eminent righteouſneſs. *We ſee Jeſus*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *for the ſuffering of death crowned with glory and honour* ‡. We ſee ſignal pre-eminence made the reward of ſignal condeſcenſion for the ſake of mankind: and ſelf-abaſement and humiliation made the road to glory. We are taught, in this great inſtance, that God never deſerts the cauſe that is his own, nor leaves worth and piety to be finally oppreſſed; though for a while he may allow trials and hardſhips to be undergone by the beſt men. No perſon could appear more

† Philipp. ii. 7, &c. ‡ Heb. ii. 9.

neglected

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neglected and forſaken by God, than our Saviour was, for a ſeaſon, when in the hands of his foes. Important purpoſes of Providence were, during that ſeaſon, carried on; but as ſoon as thoſe purpoſes were accompliſhed, God came forth in ſupport of righteouſneſs and truth, and by the high honours beſtowed on Chriſt, eſtabliſhed his eternal triunph over all his foes. SERM. XIV.

While we thus view our Saviour's aſcenſion as a glorification juſtly merited on his own account, we cannot but on our part highly rejoice in it from a ſenſe of the obligations we lie under to him. Devoid of every juſt and honourable ſentiment muſt he be, who partakes not with cordial ſatisfaction in the ſucceſs and triumph of a generous benefactor, who, for his ſake, had expoſed himſelf to much diſtreſs and danger.—In that holy Sacrament which we this day celebrated, we beheld our bleſſed Saviour deſpiſed and rejected of men; we ſaw him treated as the vileſt of malefactors, led to the hill of Golgotha with ſcorn and contempt, and

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there undergoing all that the cruelty of his enemies could contrive to inflict. All this we beheld him patiently and cheerfully induring for our ſake, in order to accompliſh our redemption.—Now, when at his next appearance we behold ſuch a glorious revolution; when we behold him riſing from the dead, aſcending into the higheſt heavens, ſitting down there at the right hand of God, and all things in heaven and earth made to bow before him, ſhall not we, my brethren, with thankful and devout hearts, partake joyfully in his exaltation and felicity?—Thou, O divine Benefactor! O illuſtrious Reſtorer of the loſt hopes and happineſs of mankind! Thou art moſt worthy to be thus raiſed above all beings. Our ſorrows once were thine. *For our tranſgreſſions thou were bruiſed; and for our iniquities, wounded.* Now, in thy joy we rejoice; and in thine honours we triumph. We with lifted hands will ever bleſs thee. Proſtrate at thy feet, we will join with all the heavenly hoſts in celebrating thy praiſes; in aſcribing to

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to *Him that loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own blood*, all power, and glory, and dominion for ever! SERM. XIV.

In the third place, Chriſt aſcended into heaven that he might act there, in the preſence of God, as our High Prieſt and Interceſſor. This office which he performs, was pre-ſignified under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, by the high prieſt entering once every year, on the great day of atonement, into the holieſt place in the temple, and there ſprinkling the blood of the ſacrifice before the mercy-ſeat. *But Chriſt being come, an High Prieſt of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect Tabernacle not made with hands, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us; he is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itſelf, now to appear in the preſence of God for us.*—*There*, we are told, *he ever liveth to make interceſſion for his people*†.—By his appear-

† Heb. ix. 11, 12. 24. Heb. viii. 2.

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ing in the human nature, while he is acting as interceſſor for mankind, an everlaſting memorial is preſented to the Almighty of the Redeemer's love to men. That ſacrifice which was offered on Mount Calvary, ſtill continues to aſcend before the throne; and that blood which was ſhed on the croſs, flows for ever in the ſight of God.

CONCERNING the nature of this interceſſion, which our Saviour is repreſented as making in heaven, and his continuing to appear in the human nature for that purpoſe, I am aware that difficulties and objections may be raiſed by ſome. I readily admit, that the whole doctrine revealed to us in Scripture relating to the incarnation of Chriſt, the atonement made by his death, and the nature of his interceſſion for us in heaven, is of a myſterious kind. It is what we can comprehend in a very imperfect manner; and when we attempt too particularly to explain or diſcuſs any of theſe doctrines, we are to *darken counſel by words without knowledge* ‡—

‡ Job, xxxviii. 2.

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Let us not however imagine that the myſterious nature of thoſe doctrines furniſhes any juſt objection againſt the truth of the chriſtian revelation. It muſt be conſidered, that this revelation profeſſes to give us ſuch a diſcovery of the ſpiritual inviſible world, and of the adminiſtration of the divine government, as was proper to be at preſent communicated to us. In ſuch a revelation of things inviſible and divine, and which ſtretch far beyond the reach of human knowledge or capacity, it was naturally to be expected that matters would occur which ſhould be myſterious, and incomprehenſible to us. Indeed, it would have been ſtrange and incredible if it had been otherwiſe; if nothing had appeared on ſuch ſubjects, but what was level to our apprehenſion. —In the preſent material ſyſtem, in midſt of which we live, and where the objects that ſurround us are continually expoſed to the examination of our ſenſes, how many things occur that are myſterious and unaccountable? The Philoſopher, age after age, has continued his reſearches into matter. After all

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all his reſearches, will he, at this day, refuſe to acknowledge, that, in material ſubſtances, qualities have been diſcovered, powers and properties have been found, which it is beyond his power to reconcile to the commonly received laws and operations of matter, and which he cannot bring within the compaſs of any eſtabliſhed ſyſtem and theory? Shall this philoſopher then, who finds himſelf ſo often baffled in his enquiries, by meeting with wonders in matter which he cannot explain, preſume to reject a religious ſyſtem, merely becauſe in the creating of an inviſible world, and the adminiſtration of government there carried on by the Father of Spirits, particulars occur which appear incomprehenſible to him? —My brethren, let us be a little more humble and ſober in our attempts to philoſophiſe. Let us be thankful, that having received a revelation, which, upon rational grounds, ſtands well atteſted and confirmed, the myſterious doctrines which occur in it are all of them ſuch as to be perfectly reconcileable with godlineſs and virtue; nay, ſuch as have a direct

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direct tendency to promote the moral influence of virtue on the lives of men; and to bring powerful conſolation to them under many troubles. SERM. XIV.

THIS is remarkably exemplified in that doctrine of which we are now treating, of the office performed by our Lord upon his aſcenſion into heaven. A mediator and interceſſor with God, is what moſt nations and religions have anxiouſly ſought to obtain. It has been at all times the favourite wiſh and hope of men; and from their earneſtneſs to have this wiſh gratified, they contrived ſome form or other of mediation and interceſſion, on which they reſted; ſome favourite hero, or ſaint, or tutelary ſubordinate god, through whoſe intervention they ſought to obtain favour from the Supreme Governor of the univerſe. This is an idea which we find prevailing under moſt of the modes of Pagan worſhip. Men were generally ſenſible that they were guilty of offences againſt the Deity; that their own ſervices were inſufficient to appeaſe

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appeaſe him; and that therefore they had no title to expect his favour, unleſs ſome mediator of high merit was to eſpouſe their intereſt and plead their cauſe. This relief which the bewildered nations ſought after in vain, is fully afforded us by the goſpel of Chriſt. A real mediator is there revealed, inveſted with ſuch characters as give encouragement and ſatisfaction to every pious worſhipper. The divine nature of which he is poſſeſſed, gives infinite merit and efficacy to every cauſe which he undertakes; and his poſſeſſing, at the ſame time, the human nature, gives us the juſteſt ground to truſt, that with compaſſion and tenderneſs he undertakes the cauſe of mankind.

The diſcovery therefore of Chriſt's acting as our interceſſor in heaven, is in the higheſt degree favourable to religion and virtue. It is ſo far from being a doctrine repugnant to the reaſon or to the natural ideas and notions of mankind, that it accords, as has been obſerved, in the general view of it, with what has

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has ever been their wiſh and their hope; and the evangelical diſcovery of the true Mediator, while it baniſhes all the ſuperſtition and idolatry which heathen ignorance had attached to a mediatory worſhip, fulfils to Chriſtians every purpoſe both of encouragement and conſolation. It encourages the humble virtuous man, who might be apt to look up with diſtruſt to the awful majeſty of Heaven. It brings conſolation to the penitent returning ſinner, from the belief that, unworthy as he is in himſelf, Chriſt the Saviour is worthy, by his powerful interceſſion, to procure his ſalvation.——What plan of religion could have been given more ſuited than this to the circumſtances of man, in his preſent ſtate of weakneſs and infirmity? What more animating to every ſincere worſhipper?—Let us ſtudy to do our beſt; and if our endeavours be faithful, and our hearts be upright, we have an advocate with the Father in heaven, on whoſe interceſſion we can rely; One *who is able to ſave to the uttermoſt, all who come unto God through* SERM. XIV.

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SERM. XIV. *through him. We have not an high prieſt which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without ſin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* *.

In the laſt place, our Saviour aſcended into heaven in order to exerciſe there the office of our King, as well as of our High Prieſt and Interceſſor. His aſcenſion was a ſolemn inveſtiture in that royal authority with which he was to act as *Head of the Church*, till the end of time. All power in heaven and earth was committed to him. In token of his being the Sovereign of both worlds, in triumph he roſe from his earthly grave, and in triumph aſcended into heaven. *Therefore let all the houſe of Iſrael know aſſuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Chriſt* †. *I have ſet my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will give him the heathen for his inhe-*

* Heb. vii. 25.—iv. 15, 16. † Acts, ii. 36.

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*ritance, and the uttermoſt parts of the earth for his poſſeſſion**.

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This view of our Lord's aſcenſion and exaltation obviouſly commands, from all Chriſtians, the moſt profound reverence and ſubmiſſion. No longer let the humble appearance he made on earth, vilify him to our apprehenſion. Never let the conſideration of his grace and goodneſs as our Interceſſor in heaven, be ſeparated from the thoughts of that awful majeſty with which his aſcenſion clothes him. With impunity none can offend him. If all the heavenly hoſts adore him, if the whole univerſe obey him, what muſt be the fate of thoſe, who, being of all creatures the moſt highly indebted to his goodneſs, revolt againſt his government, and refuſe obedience to his laws?

But while with awe and reverence the aſcenſion and regal character of our Saviour is fitted to inſpire us, it communicates alſo the higheſt ſatisfaction and comfort to our hearts. *Let the children*

* Pſalm ii. 6, 8.

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of Zion be joyful in their king *. They have a Sovereign to whoſe protection they can, with firm truſt, commit all their intereſts in life and death. There is no temptation, under which his grace cannot be ſufficient for them; no darkneſs, but he can enlighten by a ray ſent down from his eternal throne. *Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world* †. From that eminence of celeſtial glory in which he reſides, he beholds and remarks whatever is carried on throughout all his dominions. No ſecret conſpiracy can eſcape his view; no fraud of wicked men or evil ſpirits can baffle his deſigns. *The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. Kings of the earth may ſet themſelves, and the rulers take counſel together againſt the Lord and his anointed. But he that ſitteth in the heavens ſhall laugh; the Lord ſhall have them in deriſion.* As his watchful eye is ever open to obſerve, ſo his almighty arm is ever extended to guard, his church and people.——The

* Pſalm cxlix. 2. † Matth. xxviii. 20.

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ſame characters of wiſdom and power, of juſtice and mercy, which we aſcribe to the providence and dominion of God the Father, belong, in their fulleſt extent, to the kingdom and government of Chriſt the Son of God. This peculiar ſatisfaction his government affords us, that in the midſt of ſovereign authority, we know that he ſtill retains the ſame mild and compaſſionate ſpirit which he ſhowed as our High Prieſt. The meaneſt of his ſubjects is not overlooked by him. The inhabitant of the moſt obſcure cottage, equally as the poſſeſſor of the moſt ſplendid palace, dwells under his protection. He liſtens to the prayer of the poor, and deſpiſes not the ſervices they yield him. The *widow's mite* is in his ſight an acceptable offering; and even a *cup of cold water given to a diſciple in his name*, paſſes not without its reward——Hence the characters of his regal adminiſtration cannot be better deſcribed than in the beautiful language of the prophetical Pſalmiſt: *He ſhall judge the people with righteouſneſs and the poor with judgment.*

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ment. The righteous ſhall flouriſh in his days. He ſhall ſave the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppreſſor. He ſhall deliver the needy when he crieth: the poor alſo, and him that hath no helper. His name ſhall endure for ever. It ſhall be continued as long as the ſun. Men ſhall be bleſſed in him; and all nations ſhall call him bleſſed.*

WE have now under ſeveral views conſidered the aſcenſion of Chriſt, and the important purpoſes which were anſwered by it. In going along, I have pointed out ſome of the chief effects which ought to be produced on us by this object of our faith. Much more might be ſaid on this ſubject, did the bounds of a diſcourſe permit it. One improvement of the ſubject which the ſacred writers often point out, muſt not be forgotten. *If ye be riſen with Chriſt, ſeek thoſe things which are above, where Chriſt ſitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and*

* Pſalm lxxii.

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*not on things on the earth**. A certain conformity with Chriſt, their great leader, in all the circumſtances of his hiſtory, is in Scripture exacted from Chriſtians. As they muſt *die with him to ſin*, they muſt *riſe with him unto newneſs of life*; and with him aſcend in heart to heaven, and dwell in their affections where he is. The elevated hopes which Chriſt, by his reſurrection and aſcenſion, has ſet before us, ought to inſpire Chriſtians with ſuitable elevation of ſentiment above this preſent world.—As Chriſt *is in you the hope of glory, let every one who hath this hope in him, purify himſelf as Chriſt is pure*†. Let not the corrupt pleaſures of this world debaſe you. Let not its terrors deject you. But in your whole conduct, let that dignity and equanimity appear, which belongs to thoſe who have ſuch high connections. Chriſt, as your *forerunner*, hath entered into the higheſt heavens; Him, it is your part to follow, in the paths of piety and vir-

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* Coloſſ. iii. 1, 2. † 1 John, iii. 3.

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tue. In thoſe paths proceed with perſeverance and conſtancy, animated by thoſe words of your departing Redeemer, which ought ever to dwell in your remembrance: *Go to my brethren, and ſay to them, I aſcend unto my Father and your Father; to my God and your God. In my Father's houſe are many manſions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myſelf, that where I am there ye may be alſo* *.

* John, xx. 17. xiv. 2, 3.

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SERMON XV.

On a peaceable Diſpoſition.

ROMANS, xii. 18.

If it be poſſible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

IT cannot but occur to every one who has read the New Teſtament, even in a curſory manner, that there is nothing more warmly and more frequently inculcated in it, than peace and love, union and good underſtanding among men. Were a perſon to form to himſelf an idea of the ſtate of the chriſtian world, merely from reading our ſacred books, and thence inferring how they would live who believed thoſe books to be divine, he would draw, in his fancy, the faireſt picture of a happy ſociety: SERM. XV.

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SERM. XV. he would expect to meet with nothing but concord, harmony, and order; and to find the voice of clamour and contention for ever ſilent. But were ſuch a perſon, fond to be himſelf a witneſs and a partaker of ſuch a bliſsful ſtate, to come amongſt us from afar, how miſerably, alas! would he be diſappointed, when in the actual conduct of Chriſtians he diſcovered ſo little correſpondence with the mild and peaceful genius of their profeſſed religion; when he ſaw the fierce ſpirit of contention often raging unreſtrained in public; and in private, the intercourſe of men embittered, and ſociety diſordered and convulſed with quarrels about trifles! Too juſtly might he carry away with him this opprobrious report, that ſurely thoſe Chriſtians have no belief in that religion they profeſs to hold ſacred, ſeeing their practice ſo openly contradicts it.

In order to prevent, as much as we can, this reproach from attaching to us, let us now ſet ourſelves to conſider ſeriouſly the importance and the advantages

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tages of *living peaceably with all men.* SERM. XV.
—This duty may be thought by ſome to poſſeſs a low rank among the chriſtian virtues, and the phraſe a *peaceable man* to expreſs no more than a very inferior character. I admit that gentleneſs, candour, ſenſibility, and friendſhip*, expreſs a higher degree of refinement and improvement in the diſpoſition; and that a good Chriſtian ought to be diſtinguiſhed by active benevolence, and zeal for remedying the miſeries and promoting the felicity of others. But let it be remembered, that the love of peace is the foundation of all thoſe virtues. It is the firſt article in the great chriſtian doctrine of charity; and its obligation is ſtrict, in proportion as its importance is obvious. *Bleſſed are the peace-makers; for they ſhall be called the children of God* †.—I ſhall firſt ſhow what is included in the precept of *living peaceably with all all men*; and next, what arguments recommend our obedience to this precept.

* Vide Diſcources on theſe virtues in the pr ceding Volumes.

† Matth. v. 9.

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I. THIS precept implies, in the firſt place, a ſacred regard to the rules of juſtice, in rendering to every man what is his due. Without this firſt principle, there can be no friendly commerce among mankind. Juſtice is the baſis on which all ſociety reſts. Throw down its obligation, and at that inſtant you baniſh peace from the earth; you let rapine looſe, and involve all the tribes of men in perpetual hoſtility and war. To live peaceably, therefore, requires, as its firſt condition, that we content ourſelves with what is our own, and never ſeek to encroach on the juſt rights of our neighbour; that in our dealings, we take no unfair advantage; but conſcientiouſly adhere to the great rule of doing to others, according as we wiſh they ſhould do to us. It ſuppoſes that we never knowingly abet a wrong cauſe, nor eſpouſe an unjuſt ſide, but always give our countenance to what is fair and equal. We are never to diſturb any man in the enjoyment of his lawful pleaſure; nor to hinder him from advancing his lawful profit. But

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But under a sense of our natural equality. and of that mutual relation which connects us together as men, we are to carry on our private interest in consistency with what is requisite for general order and good. *Render tribute to whom tribute is due: fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Covet not what is thy brother's. Owe no man any thing thing, but to love one another.*

In the second place, the duty of living peaceably, not only prohibits all acts of open injustice, but requires us carefully to avoid giving unnecessary provocation or offence to others. When we consider from what small beginnings discord often arises, and to what astonishing heights from such beginnings it will grow, we will see much cause to watch with care over our words and actions, in our intercourse with the world. It ought to be an object of attention so to behave as never needlessly to exasperate the passions of others. In particular, we are to guard against all improper liberties of speech, and contumelious reflections on persons and characters.—

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characters.—The man of peace is mild in his demeanor, and inoffenſive in his diſcourſe. He appears to deſpiſe no man. He is not fond of contradicting and oppoſing, and is always averſe to cenſure and to blame. He never erects himſelf into the character of a dictator in ſociety. He never officiouſly ſeeks to intermeddle in the affairs of others, nor to pry into their ſecrets; and avoids every occaſion of diſturbing the good will which men appear to bear to one another.——Oppoſite to this, ſtands the character of the man of unpeaceable and quarrelſome ſpirit; who, himſelf eaſily provoked by every trifle, is continually offending and provoking others by the harſhneſs of his behaviour. He is loud in his cenſures, poſitive in his opinions, and impatient of all contradiction. He is a *buſy body in other men's matters*; deſcants on their characters, enquires into their conduct, and on the authority of his own ſuſpicions, aſſigns what motives he pleaſes to their actions. Into the violence of party-ſpirit he never fails to enter deeply; and

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and confidently aſcribes the worſt prin- SERM. XV.
ciples to all who differ from him in opi-
nion.—Such perſons are the peſts of ſociety, and the troublers of all good order in human life. *Let every man ſtudy to be quiet*, ſays the Apoſtle, *and to do his own buſineſs. Who art thou that judgeſt another man's ſervant? To his own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth**.

In the third place, the ſtudy of peace requires, that on ſome occaſions we ſcruple not to give up our own opinion, or even to depart from our ſtrict right, for the ſake of peace.—At the ſame time, for preventing miſtakes on this ſubject, it is proper to obſerve, that a tame ſubmiſſion to violence and wrongs, is not required by religion. We are not to imagine that the love of peace is only another name for cowardice; or that it ſuppreſſes every proper exertion of a manly ſpirit. The expreſſions employed in the text, *if it be poſſible, as much as lieth in you*, plainly inſinuate, that there are caſes in which it may not be

* 1 Theſſ. iv. 11. Rom. xiv. 4.

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in our power to *live peaceably with all men.* Every man is allowed to feel what is due to himself and his own character, and is entitled to support properly his own rights. In many cases the welfare of society requires that the attacks of the violent be checked and resisted.—What belongs to a good and a wise man is, to look forward coolly to the effects that are likely to follow the rigorous prosecution of any private rights of his own. If these appear to be pregnant with mischiefs to the society with which he is connected, in a much greater proportion than any advantage they can bring to himself, it then becomes his duty rather quietly to suffer wrong, than to kindle the flames of lasting discord. But how many are there, who, having once begun a claim, espoused a side, or engaged in a controversy, are determined to pursue it to the last, let the consequences be what they will? False notions of honour are brought in to justify their passions. Pride will not allow them to yield, or

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make the leaſt conceſſion, when the true point of honour would have led to generous acknowledgments and condeſcenſion. They never make the firſt advances to returning reconciliation and peace. They are haughty in their claims, and require great ſubmiſſion before they can be appeaſed.—The lover of peace, on the other hand, looks upon men and manners in a milder and ſofter light. He views them with a philoſophick, or rather a chriſtian eye. Conſcious that he himſelf has been often in the wrong; ſenſible that offence is frequently thought to be given, where no injury was intended; knowing that all men are liable to be miſled by falſe reports into unjuſt ſuſpicions of their neighbours; he can paſs over many things without diſturbance or emotion, which, in more combuſtible tempers, would kindle a flame. In all public matters in which he is engaged, he will not be pertinaciouſly adheſive to every meaſure which he has once propoſed, as if his honour were neceſſarily engaged

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gaged to carry it through. If he ſee the paſſions of men beginning to riſe and ſwell, he will endeavour to allay the growing ſtorm. He will give up his favourite ſchemes, he will yield to an opponent, rather than become the cauſe of violent embroilments; and, next to religion and a good conſcience, the cauſe of peace and union will be to him moſt ſacred and dear.

In the fourth place, our ſtudy of peace, in order to be effectual, muſt be of an extenſive nature. It muſt not be limited to thoſe with whom by intereſt, by good opinion, or by equality of ſtation, we are connected. *Live peaceably with all men*, ſays the Apoſtle. No man is to be contemned becauſe he is mean, or to be treated with incivility becauſe he is one in whom we have no concern. Even to thoſe whom we account bad men, the obligation of living at peace extends. This is not inconſiſtent with that juſt indignation which we ought to bear againſt their crimes. Without entering into any cloſe connection with them, without admitting

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admitting them to be our friends and companions, it is certainly poſſible to live amongſt them in a peaceable manner. Human ſociety is at preſent compoſed of a confuſed mixture of good and evil men; and from our imperfect knowledge of characters, it is often not eaſy to diſtinguiſh the one claſs of men from the other. We are commonly prejudiced in favour of thoſe who concur with us in our modes of thinking; and are prone to look with an evil eye on thoſe who differ from us in ſubjects of importance. But if all the ſuppoſed blemiſhes of thoſe with whom we differ in opinion; if the heretical doctrines which we aſcribe to them, or the bad principles with which we charge them, were ſufficient to juſtify the breach of peace, very little harmonious correſpondence would remain among men. Appearances of religious zeal have been too often employed to cover the pride and ill-nature of turbulent perſons.——The man of peace will bear with many whoſe opinions or practiſes he diſlikes, without

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an open and violent rupture. He will conſider it as his duty to gain upon them by mildneſs, and to reclaim them as far as he can from what is evil, by calm perſuaſion, rather than to attempt reforming them by acrimony and cenſure.——Neither indeed is it every man's office to ſet up for a reformer of the world. Every man, it is true, is bound to promote reformation by his perſonal example. But if he aſſume a ſuperiority to which he has no title; and with rude and indiſcreet zeal, adminiſter reproofs, and thruſt himſelf forward into the concerns of others, he is likely to do much more hurt than good; to break the peace of the world, without doing ſervice to the cauſe of true religion.

If it thus appears to be our duty to extend our ſtudy of peace throughout the wild ſphere of all who are round us, it will naturally occur that there is a certain narrower ſphere within which, this ſtudy ought to be particularly cultivated; towards all thoſe, I mean, with whom Nature or Providence has joined

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joined us in cloſe union, whether by bonds of friendſhip, kindred, and relation, or by the nearer ties of domeſtic and family connection. There, it moſt highly concerns every one to put in practice all the parts of that peaceable and amicable behaviour which I before have deſcribed; to guard againſt every occaſion of provocation and offence; to overlook accidental ſtarts of ill-humour; to put the moſt favourable interpretation on words and actions. The cloſer that men are brought together, they muſt unavoidably rub, at times, the more on one another. The moſt delicate attentions are requiſite, of courſe, for preventing tempers being ruffled, and peace being broken, by thoſe ſlight failings from which none are exempt. It is within the circle of domeſtic life, that the character of the man of peace will be particularly diſtinguiſhed as amiable; and where he will moſt comfortably enjoy the fruits of his happy diſpoſition. SERM. XV.

HAVING now explained the precept in the text, and ſhown what is included in

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SERM. XV. in living peaceably with all men, I come next to ſuggeſt ſome conſiderations for recommending this peaceable diſpoſition.

Let us recollect, in the firſt place, as a bond of union and peace, the natural relation which ſubſiſts among us all as men, ſprung from one father, connected by one common nature, and by fellowſhip in the ſame common neceſſities and wants; connected as Chriſtians cloſer ſtill, by acknowledgment of the ſame Lord, and participation of the ſame divine hopes. Ought leſſer difference altogether to divide and eſtrange thoſe from one another, whom ſuch ancient and ſacred bonds unite? In all other caſes, the remembrance of kindred, or brotherhood, or a common parent, and common family, tends to ſoften the harſher feelings, and often has influence, when feuds ariſe, to melt and overcome the heart. Why ſhould not a remembrance of the ſame kind, have ſome effect with reſpect to the great brotherhood of mankind.—How unnatural and ſhocking is it, if, on occaſion

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ſion of ſome angry expreſſion or trifling affront, to which ſudden paſſion or miſtaken report has given riſe, a man ſhall deliberately go forth with the barbarous purpoſe of plunging his ſword into his brother's breaſt? What a reproach to reaſon and humanity, that a ridiculous idea of honour, derived from times of Gothic groſſneſs and ignorance, ſhould ſtain the annals of modern life with ſo many tragical ſcenes of horror! SERM. XV.

Let the ſentiment of our natural connection with each other as men, diſpoſe us the more to peace, from a reflection on our common failings, and the mutual allowances which thoſe failings oblige us to make. A ſenſe of equity ſhould here ariſe, to prompt forbearance and forgiveneſs. Were there any man who could ſay that he had never, in the courſe of his life, ſuffered himſelf to be tranſported by paſſion, or given juſt ground of offence to any one, ſuch a man might have ſome plea for impatience, when he received from others unreaſonable treatment. But if no ſuch perfectly unexceptionable characters

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racters are to be found, how unjuſt is it not to give to others thoſe allowances which we, in our turn, muſt claim from them?—To our own failings we are always blind. Our pride and ſelf-conceit render us quarrelſome and contentious, by nouriſhing a weak and childiſh ſenſibility to every fancied point of our own honour or intereſt, while they ſhut up all regard to the honour or intereſt of our brethren. From the high region of imaginary ſelf-eſtimation, let us deſcend to our own juſt and proper level. Let us calmly reflect on the place we hold in ſociety, and on the juſtice that is due to others. From ſuch reflections we will learn to be more humble in our claims, and more moderate in our pretenſions; and many of the cauſes of animoſity and contention will die away.

Let us conſider, in the next place how trifling and inconſiderable, for the moſt part, the cauſes are of contention and diſcord among mankind, and how much

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much they deſerve to be overlooked by the wiſe and the good. When we view the eagerneſs with which conteſts are agitated in ſociety, and look to the bitterneſs and wrath they ſo oft occaſion, one would think that all were at ſtake, and that there could be no life, no happineſs on earth, unleſs to him who was victorious in the conteſt. And yet, in how few inſtances has there been any juſt ground for this mighty ferment of ſpirits?—You have been ſlighted, perhaps, by a ſuperior; you have been ungratefully treated by a friend; a rival has over-reached you by fraud, or overcome you by more powerful intereſt. Amidſt the buſtle of life, amidſt the interfering and croſſing of various purſuits and intereſts, are not ſuch incidents to be expected by every one? Ought you not to have been prepared for encountering them without paſſion or violence, as evils belonging to the common lot of humanity? As light bodies are ſhaken and torn by every breath of wind, while thoſe that are ſolid reſiſt the blaſt;

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so it is only the little and mean mind that loses possession of itself on every trifling provocation; while a great and firm spirit keeps its place, and rests on a basis of its own, unshaken by the common disturbances of life.——Of what small moment to your real happiness, are many of those injuries which draw forth your resentment? They may affect in some degree your wordly interests; but can they affect your true honour as a man? Can they deprive you of peace of conscience, of the satisfaction of having acted a right part, of the pleasing sense of being esteemed by men, and the hope of being rewarded by God, for your generosity and forgiveness?—In the moments of eager contention, all is magnified and distorted in its appearance. A false light is thrown on every object. Nothing appears to be what it really is. But let the hour of violence pass over; let the course of time bring forward recollection and calmness, and you will wonder at your former violence. Objects which once were so formidable, will then have disappeared.

A new

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A new ſcene has taken place; and the grounds of former contention will ſeem as dreams of the night, which have paſſed away.—Act then now the part of a man, by anticipating that period of coolneſs, which time will certainly bring. You will then ceaſe to break the peace of ſociety with your angry contentions. You will ſhow that magnanimity which belongs to thoſe who depend not for their happineſs merely on the occurrences of the world. *He that is ſlow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his ſpirit, than he that taketh a city**.

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LET us now conſider the different conſequences of a contentious ſpirit, and of a peaceable diſpoſition, with reſpect to our happineſs and enjoyment. The foundation of happineſs muſt certainly be laid within our breaſts. If one be pained and uneaſy there, external circumſtances, how flouriſhing ſoever, avail him nothing: And what feelings are more uneaſy and painful than the

* Prov. xvi. 32.

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workings of ſour and angry paſſions? Great and manifold as the natural and unavoidable diſtreſſes of our preſent ſtate are, they are ſmall in compariſon of the evils which men bring upon themſelves, and bring upon one another, by variance and diſcord. I ſpeak not now of public calamities, of faction and ambition raging through the world, and hoſtile armies laying waſte the earth with deſolation and bloodſhed. Confining our views ſolely to private life, how miſerably is all its comfort and order deſtroyed by thoſe jealouſies, feuds, and animoſities, that ſo often break the peace of families, tear aſunder the bonds of friendſhip, and poiſon all that ſocial intercourſe which men were formed to entertain with one another? From a ſmall chink, which ſome rude hand has opened. the bitter waters of ſtrife eaſily flow, but of this we may be aſſured, that a full portion of their bitterneſs ſhall be taſted by him who has let them forth. Never was any man active in diſquieting others, who did not at the ſame

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ſame time diſquiet himſelf. While the tempeſt which he has raiſed may be burſting on his neighbour, he will be obliged to feel the hurricane raging in his own breaſt: and from his reſtleſſneſs, impatience. and eagerneſs, joined with anxious trepidations and fears, will often ſuffer more than all that he can inflict on his adverſary. SERM. XV.

From ſuch painful ſenſations the man of peace is free. A mild, unruffled, ſelf-poſſeſſing mind is a bleſſing more important to real felicity, than all that can be gained by the triumphant iſſue of ſome violent conteſt. Never was a truer axiom pronounced by any mouth, than what was uttered by the wiſe man of old; *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a ſtalled ox and hatred therewith* *. With a ſcanty proviſion of the good things of this world, a wiſe man may be contented and happy; but without peace, all the luxuries of the rich loſe their reliſh.——While among the ſons of ſtrife all is tempeſtuous and

* Prov. xv. 17.

loud;

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loud; the ſmooth ſtream, the ſerene atmoſphere, the mild zephyr, are the proper emblems of a gentle temper, and a peaceable life. Nor is this merely a poetical alluſion. The ordinary language of diſcourſe, where the terms are ſo often employed of a ſtorm of paſſion, a calm mind, a rough or a fiery temper, plainly ſhew that all men are ſenſible of ſome analogy between a peaceable diſpoſition, and thoſe ſcenes of external nature that are univerſally agreeable and pleaſant. The condition of thoſe who are living in unity with their brethren, is likened by the pſalmiſt David *to the dew of Hermon; the dew that deſcended on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the bleſſing, even life for evermore* *.

While the man of this diſpoſition is happy within himſelf, let it not be forgotten, that he is at the ſame time gaining on all around him. From the quarrelſome and rude, all men naturally recoil; and, except when neceſſity obliges

* Pſalm cxxxiii. 3.

them,

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them, avoid their intercourſe. But the lover of peace conciliates general good-will; and is both reſpected and beloved. Though no abſolute ſecurity can be deviſed againſt the malice and injuſtice of the world, yet, for the moſt part, it will be found that there is no more effectual guard againſt violence, no ſurer road to a ſafe enjoyment of life, than an eſtabliſhed character for benignity and regard to peace. The man of this character, if unjuſtly attacked, will have many to defend him and take his part. In his proſperity he will be unenvied, and his misfortunes will be alleviated by general ſympathy. SERM. XV.

LET us conſider, in the laſt place, how ſtrongly the precept in the text is enforced by the moſt ſacred religious obligations. You all know what a high place charity, under all its forms of meekneſs, forbearance, and forgiveneſs, poſſeſſes in the Chriſtian ſyſtem. To bring authorities in ſupport of this, were to recite a great part of the New Teſtament

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Teſtament before you.——The God whom we worſhip, is known by the title of *the God of Peace.* That evil ſpirit who is oppoſite to him, is deſcribed with all the characters which expreſs malignity; *the enemy, the accuſer, the liar, the deſtroyer.* When Chriſt came into the world as our Saviour, he is ſtyled the Prince of Peace. The bleſſings which were proclaimed at his birth were, *peace upon earth, and good-will towards men.* The whole of his life was one continued exemplification of all the virtues that characterize the meek, the peaceable, and forgiving ſpirit. Never was any one's temper tried by ſo many and ſo great provocations; never did any one retain, under theſe provocations, ſuch a calm and unruffled tenor of mind; inſomuch that the Apoſtle Paul, on an occaſion of earneſt intreaty to the Corinthians, *beſeeches* them *by the meekneſs and gentleneſs of Chriſt,* as the moſt noted and well-known parts of his character *. What can be ſaid

* 2 Corinth. x. 1.

higher

higher of any virtue than that it is the quality, under the denomination of which, the Son of God choſe to be known when he dwelt on earth? Let us add, that it is alſo the diſtinguiſhing character of God's own ſpirit. The Holy Ghoſt is called the *Spirit of Peace. Meekneſs, gentleneſs, and long ſuffering*, are expreſsly denominated *his fruits*; and on a certain memorable occaſion, his appearance was marked with ſignals that expreſs the mild and quiet ſpirit as diſtinguiſhed from violence. When Elijah the great prophet was called to go forth and ſtand before the Lord, *behold a great and ſtrong wind rent the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After that, there came forth a ſtill ſmall voice. When Elijah heard it*, he knew the ſymbol of God's ſpirit; *he wrapped his face in his mantle*, and worſhipped*.

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* 1 Kings, xix. 11, 12, 13.

AFTER

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AFTER ſo many teſtimonies given by the ſacred writings to the high importance of a meek and peaceable ſpirit, what ſhall we think of thoſe, who, in their ſyſtem of religion, make ſlight account of this virtue; who are ready to quarrel with others on the moſt trifling occaſions; who are continually diſquieting their families by peeviſhneſs and ill-humour; and by malignant reports, raiſing diſſenſion among friends and neighbours; Can any claims to ſound belief, or any ſuppoſed attainments of grace, ſupply the defect of ſo cardinal a virtue as charity and love?—Let ſuch perſons particularly bethink themſelves how little the ſpirit which they poſſeſs, fits them for the kingdom of heaven, or rather how far it removes them from the juſt hope of ever entering into it. Hell is the proper region of enmity and ſtrife. There dwell unpeaceable and fiery ſpirits, in the midſt of mutual hatred, wrath, and tumult. But the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of peace. There, *charity never faileth.* There, reigneth the God of

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Love; and in his preſence, all the bleſſed inhabitants are of one heart and one ſoul. No ſtring can ever be heard to jar in that celeſtial harmony; and therefore the contentious and violent are, both by their own nature and by God's decree, for ever excluded from the heavenly ſociety.—As the beſt preparation for thoſe bleſſed manſions, let us ever keep in view that direction given by an Apoſtle; *Follow peace with all men, and holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord**. To the cultivation of amity and *peace* in all our ſocial intercourſe, let us join *holineſs*; that is, piety and active virtue: and thus we ſhall paſs our days comfortably on earth, and at the concluſion of our days, be admitted to dwell among ſaints and angels, and *to ſee the Lord.*

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* Heb. xii. 14.

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SERMON XVI.

On Religious Joy, as giving Strength and Support to Virtue.

NEHEMIAH, viii. 10.

—*The joy of the Lord is your ſtrength.*

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NEHEMIAH, the governor of Jeruſalem, having aſſembled the people of Iſrael immediately after their return from the captivity of Babylon, made the book of the law be brought forth and read before them. On hearing the words of the book of the law, we are informed that *all the people wept*; humbled and caſt down by the ſenſe of their preſent weak and forlorn condition, compared with the flouriſhing ſtate of their anceſtors. Nehemiah ſought to raiſe their

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their ſpirits from this dejection; and exhorts them to prepare themſelves for ſerving the God of their fathers with a cheerful mind; *for*, ſays he, *the joy of the Lord is your ſtrength.* SERM. XVI.

Abſtracted from the occaſion on which the words were ſpoken, they contain an important truth, which I now purpoſe to illuſtrate; that to the nature of true religion there belongs an inward joy, which animates, ſtrengthens, and ſupports virtue. The illuſtration of this poſition will require that I ſhould ſhow, in the firſt place, that in the practice of religious duties there is found an inward joy, here ſtyled the *joy of the Lord*; and in the next place, that this joy is juſtly denominated the *ſtrength* of the righteous.

I. Joy is a word of various ſignification. By men of the world, it is often uſed to expreſs thoſe flaſhes of mirth which ariſe from irregular indulgences of ſocial pleaſure; and of which it is ſaid by the wiſe man, that in ſuch *laughter the heart is ſorrowful, and the end*

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*end of that mirth is heaviness**. It will be easily understood that the *joy* here mentioned partakes of nothing akin to this; but signifies a tranquil and placid joy, an inward complacency and satisfaction, accompanying the practice of virtue, and the discharge of every part of our duty. A joy of this kind is what we assert to belong to every part of religion; to characterise religion wherever it is genuine, and to be essential to its nature.—In order to ascertain this, let us consider the disposition of a good man with respect to God; with respect to his neighbours; and with respect to the government of his own mind.

When we consider in what manner religion requires that a good man should stand affected towards God, it will presently appear that rational enlightened piety opens such views of him as must communicate joy. It presents him,

* Prov. xiv. 13.

not

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not as an awful unknown Sovereign, but as the Father of the Univerſe, the Lover and Protector of righteouſneſs, under whoſe government all the intereſts of the virtuous are ſafe. With delight the good man traces the Creator throughout all his works, and beholds them every where reflecting ſome image of his ſupreme perfection. In the morning dawn, the noontide glory, and the evening ſhade; in the fields, the mountains, and the flood, where worldly men behold nothing but a dead, unintereſting ſcene; every object is enlivened and animated to him by the preſence of God. Amidſt that divine preſence he dwells with reverence, but without terror. Conſcious of the uprightneſs of his own intentions, and of the fidelity of his heart to God, he conſiders himſelf, by night and by day, as under the protection of an invifible guardian. He *lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his aid*; and commits himſelf without diſtruſt to the *Keeper of Iſrael, who never ſlumbers nor ſleeps.* He liſtens to the gracious promiſes SERM. XVI.

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promises of his word. With comfort he receives the declarations of his mercy to mankind through a Great Redeemer; in virtue of whose atonement provision is made for pardon to human infirmities, and for our reception in the end into a happier world. All the various devotional exercises of faith and trust in God, all the cordial effusions of love and gratitude to this Supreme Benefactor in the acts of prayer and praise, afford scope to those emotions of the heart which are of the most pleasing kind; and which diffuse a gentle and softening tenderness over the affections. In a word, a truly pious man, who has always before him an object so sublime and interesting as this great Father of the universe, on whom his thoughts can dwell with satisfaction, may be truly said to partake highly in the *joy of the Lord*.

But it may here be objected, are there no mortifications and griefs that particularly belong to piety? What shall we say to the tear of repentance, and to that humiliation of confession and remorse which may

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may, at times, be incumbent on the most pious, in this ſtate of human infirmity?—To this I reply, firſt, that although there may be ſeaſons of grief and dejection in a courſe of piety, yet this is not inconſiſtent with the joy of the Lord, being, on the whole, the predominant character of a good man's ſtate; as it is impoſſible that, during this life, perpetual brightneſs can remain in any quarter, without ſome dark cloud. But I muſt obſerve next, that even the penitential ſorrows and relentings of a pious heart, are not without their own ſatisfactions. A certain degree of pleaſure is mingled with the tears which the returning offender ſheds, in the hours of compunction; the ingenuous contrition that he feels, relieves his heart, at the ſame time that it gives it pain. If we attend to the workings of human nature on other occaſions, we ſhall find that it is no unuſual thing for a ſecret myſterious pleaſure to be mixed with painful feelings. This we all know to be the caſe in thoſe exerciſes of pity and commiſeration to

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which we are led by ſympathy with the afflicted. We grieve and are pained for their diſtreſs; yet we chuſe to indulge that grief; ſatisfaction is felt in the indulgence; and we are unwillingly ſeparated from the object which has occaſioned this painful, but tender ſympathy. A mixture ſomewhat ſimilar, of pleaſure and pain, takes place in the ſentiments of penitential ſorrow, which good men ſometimes feel. In the midſt of their diſtreſs, they are ſoothed by an internal conſciouſneſs, that they are affected as it becomes them to be; that they feel as they ought to feel; and they are gradually relieved by the hope riſing in their breaſt, of finding mercy and acceptance with their Creator and Redeemer. Where the mind is properly inſtructed in religion, it will not long be left in a ſtate of overwhelming dejection, but will return to tranquility, and repoſſeſs again the *joy of the Lord.*

WHEN we conſider, next, the diſpoſition of a good man towards his fellow-creatures, we ſhall find here the joy

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joy of the Lord exerting its influence fully. That mild and benevolent temper to which he is formed by virtue and piety; a temper that is free from envious and malignant paſſions, and that can look with the eye of candour and humanity on ſurrounding characters, is a conſtant ſpring of cheerfulneſs and ſerenity. Indeed, if there be joy at all in human life, it is, perhaps, in this ſtate of the mind that it is moſt ſenſibly felt, and felt with the leaſt check or allay. It is truly ſaid, *to the wicked there is no peace.* In proportion as any one of the bad paſſions predominates in the breaſt, it never fails, in the ſame proportion, to corrode the heart, and to ſhed over all the comforts of life a poiſonous and baneful influence. Whereas all thoſe exerciſes of friendſhip, compaſſion and generoſity, which are eſſential to the diſpoſition of a virtuous man, are to him lively enjoyments of pleaſure in themſelves, and increaſe the ſatisfaction which he taſtes in all the other innocent pleaſures of life. He knows that he enjoys them along with

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the good-will and the bleſſings of all to whom he has ſtudied to do good. When he can cheer the dejected or gladden the ſorrowful, he is cheered and gladdened himſelf. If his circumſtances allow him not to do all the good he wiſhes to have done, yet in the conſciouſneſs of good intentions there is always an inward ſatisfaction; and in thoſe leſſer offices of kindneſs and humanity which are within the ſphere of every man to perform, he enjoys innumerable occaſions of being pleaſed and happy.

With reſpect to that part of religion which conſiſts in the government of a man's own mind, of his paſſions and deſires, it may be thought that much joy is not to be expected. For there religion appears to lay on a ſevere and reſtraining hand. Strict temperance and ſelf-denial are often requiſite; and much is on ſome occaſions abridged, of what is apt to be reckoned the full and free enjoyment of life. Yet, here alſo it will be found, that the *joy of the Lord* takes place. To a perſon juſt reclaimed from

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from the exceſſes of ſenſual indulgence, the reſtraints impoſed by virtue will, at firſt, appear uncouth and mortifying. But let him begin to be accuſtomed to a regular life, and his taſte will ſoon be rectified, and his feelings will change. In purity, temperance, and ſelf-government, there is found a ſatisfaction in the mind, ſimilar to what reſults from the enjoyment of perfect health in the body. A man is then conſcious that all is ſound within. There is nothing that gnaws his ſpirit; that makes him aſhamed of himſelf; or diſcompoſes his calm and orderly enjoyment of life. His conſcience teſtifies that he is acting honourably. He enjoys the ſatisfaction of being maſter of himſelf. He feels that no man can accuſe him of degrading his character by baſe pleaſures or low purſuits; and knows that he will be honoured and eſteemed by thoſe whoſe honour and eſteem he would moſt deſire; all which are ſenſations moſt pleaſing and gratifying to every human heart.

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FROM this slight sketch it plainly appears, that there is an inward satisfaction, justly termed *the joy of the Lord*, which runs through all the parts of religion. This is a very different view of religion from what is entertained by those who consider it as a state of perpetual penance; to which its votaries unwillingly submit, merely from the dread of punishment in hell; and who bargain for the rewards of another world, by a renunciation of all that is agreeable or comfortable to man in this world. Such conceptions of religion are contradicted by the experience of every truly virtuous man, and are directly opposite to the views of religion given us in the word of God; wherein its ways are termed *ways of pleasantness and paths of peace*; and where we are assured that *in the keeping of God's commands*, there is an immediate *great reward*.

But what it concerns us at present to remark is, that some experience of this *joy of the Lord* which I have described, enters as an essential part into the character of every good man. In proportion

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to the degree of his goodneſs, to his improvement and progreſs in virtue, will be the degree of his participation in the pleaſure and joy of religion. But wherever ſuch pleaſure is entirely unknown; wherever there is no ſatisfaction and delight in the diſcharge of virtuous duties, there we are obliged to conclude, that religion does not ſubſiſt in its genuine ſtate. It is either a ſanctimonious ſhow merely; a forced appearance of piety and virtue, tinctured, perhaps, with ſome deep ſhades of ſuperſtition; or, at beſt, it is religion in its moſt weak and imperfect ſtate. It is deficient in the re-generation of the heart. The man himſelf is in a divided and hovering ſtate, between two oppoſite principles of action; partly affecting to be obedient to God's commands, and partly a ſlave to the world. The truth and importance of this obſervation will more fully appear, when we proceed to what was propoſed for the SERM. XVI.

IId. Head of diſcourſe,—to ſhew in what reſpects the joy of the Lord is juſtly ſaid to be *the ſtrength of the righteous.*

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In the first place, it is the animating principle of virtue; it supports its influence, and assists it in becoming both persevering and progressive. Experience may teach us that few undertakings are lasting or successful, which are accompanied with no pleasure. If a man's religion be considered merely as a task prescribed to him, which he feels burdensome and oppressive, it is not likely that he will long constrain himself to act against the bent of inclination. It is not until he feels somewhat within him which attracts him to his duty, that he can be expected to be constant and zealous in the performance of it. Was it ever found that a person advanced far in any art or study, whether of the liberal or mechanical kind, in which he had no pleasure, to which he had no heart, but which, from motives merely of interest or fear, he was compelled to undertake? Is it then to be thought that religion will prove the only exception to what holds so generally, and will continue an actuating principle of conduct, whether we love it for its own sake, or not? It is true, that a sense of duty may

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ſometimes exerciſe its authority, though there be no ſenſations of pleaſure to aſſiſt it. Belief of thoſe religious principles in which we were educated, and dread of future puniſhment, will, in caſes where no ſtrong temptation aſſails us, reſtrain from the commiſſion of atrocious crimes, and produce ſome decent regularity of external conduct. But on occaſions when inclination or intereſt prompt to ſome tranſgreſſion of virtue, which ſafety or ſecrecy encourages, and which the example of the world ſeems to countenance; when the preſent advantage or pleaſure appears to be all on one ſide, and no ſatisfaction ariſes to counterbalance it on the other; is it to be thought that conſcience will then ſtand its ground, with one who never was attached to virtue on its own account, and never experienced any joy in following its dictates?——But theſe are the occaſions when the *joy of the Lord* proves the *ſtrength of the righteous man.* Accuſtomed to take pleaſure in doing his duty; accuſtomed to look up to God with delight and complacency, and

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and to feel himſelf happy in all the offices of kindneſs and humanity to men around him; accuſtomed to rejoice in a clear conſcience, in a pure heart, and the hope of heavenly bliſs; he cannot think of parting with ſuch ſatisfactions for the ſake of any worldly bribe. There is ſomething within his heart, that pleads for religion and virtue. He has ſeen their beauty; he has taſted their ſweetneſs: and having ſuch pleaſures within himſelf, to oppoſe to all the pleaſures of ſin, he is enabled to maintain his integrity inviolate; or if in any degree he has deviated from it, ſpeedy remorſe is awakened, and he cannot be ſatisfied with himſelf till he returns back to the right path. Thus, through the *joy of the Lord*, religion becomes in him *the ſpirit of love, and power, and of a ſound mind* *. It is the *peace of God, which paſſeth underſtanding, keeping his mind and heart.* †. It is the *path of the juſt, which is as the light, ſhining more and more unto the perfect day.*

* 2 Tim. i. 7. † Philipp. iv. 7.

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In the next place, the joy of the Lord is the *ſtrength of the righteous*, as it is their great ſupport under the diſcouragements and trials of life. In the days of their eaſe and proſperity, it guards them, as has been ſhown, againſt the temptations of vice; and in the general tenor of conduct, attaches them to the ſide of virtue: and when the evil days come, wherein they ſhall have no pleaſure from the world, it ſupplies them with pleaſures of another kind, to preſerve them from improper deſpondency, or from entering into evil courſes for the ſake of relief.—A good man's friends may forſake him; or may die, and leave him to mourn. His fortune may fail, or his health decay. Calumny and reproach may unjuſtly attack his character. In circumſtances of this kind, where wordly men become peeviſh, diſpirited, and fretful, he who is acquainted with the pleaſures of religion and virtue, can poſſeſs himſelf calm and undiſturbed. He has reſources within unknown to the world, whence light *ariſes to him in darkneſs*. From the

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the gloom or turbulence of external evils he can retreat to the enjoyment of his own mind. In the exercises of devotion, his heart is elevated, and the cares of the world are forgotten. In his regular discharge of all the social duties of life, he finds cheerfulness and pleasure. Hence his temper is not soured. He accuses neither God nor man for the unavoidable misfortunes of life. He submits with patience to the common lot; looking forward with good hope to better days; retaining always honourable thoughts of God's providence, and sentiments of candour towards men.—In this manner, his experience of the joy of the Lord becomes *his strength*; as infusing into his mind a principle of firmness, and stability, and enabling him, in every situation of fortune, to continue the same.

FROM the view which we have now taken of the subject, it must clearly appear, that to every one who wishes to possess the spirit, and to support the character of genuine goodness and virtue, it

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it is an object moſt deſirable and important, to acquire a prevailing reliſh for the pleaſures of religion. As this is a moſt important object, ſo alſo it is an attainable one by every man whoſe intentions are ſincerely upright. For let it be remembered, that the *joy of the Lord*, which I have deſcribed as *the ſtrength of the righteous*, is not to be underſtood as a privilege belonging only to ſaints of the higheſt order, who can aſſuredly truſt to their being the choſen of God. It is not to be underſtood of high raptures, and tranſports of religious fervour. It is not even confined to the ſole pleaſures of intercourſe with God in devotion; though aſſuredly theſe conſtitute one great part of the *joy of the Lord*, and are auxiliary to its exerciſe on every other occaſion. The *joy of the Lord* is to be underſtood of that joy, which accompanies the whole of religious and virtuous practice; that ſatisfaction, which a good man feels in rhe diſcharge of his duty, which accompanies the performance of all the offices which belong to the ſtation of life

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life in which he is placed; whether these be of a publie nature or private; ſocial and domeſtic, or relating particularly to the exerciſes of religious worſhip and devotion.

To attain this ſpirit, of conſidering the diſcharge of our duty as our pleaſure and happineſs, is certainly not incompatible with our preſent ſtate of infirmity. It is no more than what good men have often attained and have teſtified of it; that *their delight was in the law of God;* that his *ſtatutes were ſweet to their taſte;* that *they had taken them as an heritage for ever, for they were the rejoicing of their heart. I delight to do thy will,* O *my God; thy law is within my heart**.—According to the proficiency which men have made in virtue, will be the degree of ſatisfaction which they receive from the performance of it: but where no pleaſures or ſatisfactions of this kind are known, men have much ground to diſtruſt their pretenſions to godlineſs or chriſtianity.

* Pſ. xl. 8. cxix. 111.

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It is therefore of high importance, that all proper means be employed to form our internal taſte to a proper reliſh for this joy of the Lord. For it is not to be diſſembled, that much is againſt us in our endeavours to have our diſpoſition formed for reliſhing virtuous pleaſures. We breathe in this world a ſort of vitiated air, very unfriendly to the health and ſoundneſs of all our moral feelings. From our earlieſt youth we are bred up in admiration of the external advantages of fortune; and are accuſtomed to hear them extolled as the only real and ſubſtantial goods. We muſt therefore begin by ſtudying to correct theſe falſe ideas, and perſuading ourſelves that there are other things beſides riches, honours, and ſenſual pleaſures, that are good for man; that there are joys of a ſpiritual and intellectual nature, which directly affect the mind and heart, and which confer a ſatisfaction both more refined and more laſting than any worldly circumſtances can confer. In order to have a fair trial of the value and effect of thoſe ſpiritual

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ſpiritual enjoyments, we muſt forbear polluting ourſelves with groſs and guilty pleaſures; we muſt even refrain from indulging worldly pleaſures that appear innocent, in a profuſe and intemperate degree, leſt they ſenſualize and debaſe our feelings. By preſerving a wiſe and manly temperance in lower pleaſures and purſuits, we will then allow thoſe of a higher kind to occupy their proper place; and ſhall be in a ſituation fairly to compare the pure ſenſations of pleaſure which ariſe from the conſciouſneſs of diſcharging our duty, with the tranſient and turbid gratifications of ſin and the world. To ſuch endeavours of our own, for rectifying and improving our taſte of pleaſure, let us join frequent and fervent prayer to God, that he may enlighten and reform our hearts; and by his ſpirit communicate that joy to our ſouls, which deſcends from him, and which he has annexed to every part of religion and virtue as the *ſtrength of the righteous.*

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SERMON XVII.

On the Folly of the Wisdom of the World.

1 CORINTH. iii. 19.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.——

THE judgment which we form of ourselves, often differs widely from that which is formed of us by God, whose judgment alone is always conformable to the truth. In our opinion of the abilities which we imagine ourselves to possess, there is always much self-flattery; and in the happiness which we expect to enjoy in this world, there is always much deceit. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than concealed misery: as there is a worldly honour,

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which in his eſtimation is reproach; ſo, as the text informs us, there is a *wiſdom of this world*, which *is fooliſhneſs with God.* Aſſuredly there is nothing in which it imports us more that our judgment ſhould agree with the truth, than in what relates to wiſdom. It is the qualification upon which every man is inclined to value himſelf, more than on any other. They who can with patience ſuffer imputations on other parts of their character, are ready to loſe their temper, and to feel ſore and hurt when they are attacked for deficiency in prudence and judgment. Wiſdom is juſtly conſidered as the guide of conduct. If any capital error ſhall take place reſpecting it; if one ſhall miſtake that for wiſdom which at bottom is mere folly, ſuch a miſtake will pervert the firſt principles of conduct, and be perpetually miſleading a man through the whole of life.—As the text plainly intimates that this miſtake does often take place in the world, and as it materially concerns us all to be on our guard againſt ſo great a danger, I ſhall endeavour to ſhow,

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ſhow, firſt, what the nature and ſpirit of that *wiſdom of the world* is, which is here condemned; and next, in what ſenſe and on what account it is ſtyled *fooliſhneſs with God.* SERM. XVII.

I. LET us conſider the nature of that wiſdom which is reprobated in the text as fooliſhneſs with God. It is ſtyled the *wiſdom of this world;* that is, the wiſdom which is moſt current, and moſt prized in this world; the wiſdom which particularly diſtinguiſhes the character of thoſe who are commonly known by the name of *men of the world.* Its firſt and moſt noted diſtinction is, that its purſuits are confined entirely to the temporal advantages of the world. Spiritual bleſſings, or moral improvements, the man of this ſpirit rejects as a ſort of airy unſubſtantial enjoyments, which he leaves to the ſpeculative and the ſimple; attaching himſelf wholly to what he reckons the only ſolid goods, the poſſeſſion of riches and influence, of reputation and power, together with all the conveniencies and pleaſures which opulent rank or ſtation can procure.

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In purſuit of theſe favourite ends he is not in the leaſt ſcrupulous as to his choice of means. If he prefer thoſe which are the faireſt, it is not becauſe they are fair, but becauſe they ſeem to him moſt likely to prove ſucceſsful. He is ſenſible that it is for his intereſt to preſerve decorums, and to ſtand well in the public opinion. Hence he is ſeldom an openly profligate man, or marked by any glaring enormities of conduct. In this reſpect, his character differs from that of thoſe who are commonly called *men of pleaſure*. Them he conſiders as a thoughtleſs giddy herd, who are the victims of paſſion and momentary impulſe. The thorough-bred man of the world is more ſteady and regular in his purſuits. He is, for the moſt part, compoſed in his manners, and decent in his vices. He will often find it expedient to be eſteemed by the world as worthy and good. But to be thought good, anſwers his purpoſe much better than ſubjecting himſelf to become really ſuch; and what he can conceal from the world, he conceives to be the ſame

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ſame as if it had never been.—Let me here remark in paſſing, that the character which I am now deſcribing, is one leſs likely to be reclaimed and reformed, than that of thoſe whom I mentioned above as the men of pleaſure. With them, vice breaks forth in occaſional fits and ſtarts; with the other, it grows up into a hardened and confirmed principle. In the midſt of the groſs irregularities of pleaſure, circumſtances often force remorſe on the ſinner's mind. Moments of compunction ariſe, which may be ſucceeded by conviction and reformation. But the cool and temperate plan of iniquity, on which the man of worldly wiſdom proceeds, allows the voice of conſcience to be longer ſilent. The alarm which it gives, is not ſo loud and violent as to awaken him at once from his evil courſes, and inſtantly to prepare him for a better mind.

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The man of the world is always a man of ſelfiſh and contracted diſpoſition. Friends, country, duty, honour, all diſappear from his view, when his own intereſt is in queſtion. He is of a hard

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a hard heart; he chooſes indeed to be ſo, leſt at any time the unguarded effuſions of kind affections ſhould carry him beyond the line of worldly wiſdom. The more thoroughly that the ſpirit of the world has taken poſſeſſion of him, the circle of his affections becomes always the narrower. His family will perhaps find place, as connected with his own importance, and with his plans either of power or wealth; but all beyond that circle are excluded from any particular regard. It is his great principle never to embark ſeriouſly in any undertaking, from which he foreſees no benefit likely to redound to himſelf. Public ſpirit he conſiders either as a mere chimera created by the ſimple, or a pretence employed by the artful for their own purpoſe. Judging of the reſt of the world by what he feels within himſelf, he proceeds on the ſuppoſition that all men are carrying on intereſted deſigns of their own, and of courſe is ever on his guard againſt them. Hence, to the cordialities of friendſhip he is an entire ſtranger:

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ſtranger; too much wrapt up in himſelf, indeed, to be a friend to any one; and if his prudence reſtrains him from being an open and violent enemy, yet he is always an unforgiving one. SERM. XVII.

Candour, openneſs, and ſimplicity of manners, are ridiculed by the man of this deſcription, as implying mere ignorance of the world. Art and addreſs are the qualities on which he values himſelf. For the moſt part, he would chooſe to ſupplant a rival by intrigue, rather than to overcome him by fair oppoſition. Indeed, what men call policy and knowledge of the world, is commonly no other thing than diſſimulation and inſincerity. The world is a great ſchool, where deceit in all its forms is one of the leſſons that is firſt learned, and moſt eagerly caught by ſuch as aſpire to be proficients in worldly wiſdom. A man of the world, in ſhort, is one, who, upon any call of intereſt, flatters and deceives you; who can ſmile in your face, while he is contriving

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triving plans for your ruin; who, upon no occaſion, thinks of what is right, or fit, or honourable; but only of what is expedient and uſeful to himſelf.

I HAVE dwelt the more fully on the delineation of this character, that each of us might learn whether there be any feature in it that applies to himſelf; as it is a character too frequently met with in the world, and not always ſo ſeverely reprobated as it ought to be. Let me now aſk, whether ſuch a character as I have deſcribed be in any reſpect an amiable one? Is the man of the world, poliſhed, and plauſible, and courtly, as in his behaviour he may be, one whom you would chooſe for a companion and boſom-friend? Would you wiſh him for a ſon, a brother, or a huſband? Would you reckon yourſelf ſafe in confiding your intereſts to him, or entruſting him with your ſecrets? Nay, let me aſk, if he be one whom in your hearts

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you reſpect and honour? His ſhrewd- SERM.
neſs and abilities you may perhaps ad- XVII.
mire; ſtand in awe of him you may; and for the ſake of advantage, may wiſh him to be on your ſide. But could you honour him as a parent; or venerate him as a magiſtrate; or would you wiſh to live under him as a ſovereign? Of what real value then, let me aſk, is that boaſted wiſdom of the world, which can neither conciliate love, nor produce truſt, nor command inward reſpect?——At the ſame time, I admit that the man of the world may be a man of very conſiderable abilities. He may diſplay talents of many different ſorts. Beſides art and ſagacity, he may poſſeſs genius and learning; he may be diſtinguiſhed for eloquence in ſupporting his own cauſe; he may have valour and courage to defend himſelf againſt his enemies.——But obſerve, I entreat you, a conſequence that follows. You ſee in this inſtance, that the moſt diſtinguiſhed human abilities, when they are ſeparated from virtue and moral worth, loſe their chief eminence and

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and luſtre, and are deprived of all valuable efficacy. They dwindle into deſpicable talents, which have no power to command the hearts, nor to enſure the reſpect and honour of mankind. Let it be carefully obſerved, and always remembered, that integrity, probity, and moral worth, are eſſentially requiſite to give the ſtamp of real excellence to any powers or abilities which the human mind can poſſeſs. ——Having now conſidered the nature and effect of worldly wiſdom with reſpect to men, let us enquire,

II. How it ſtands with reſpect to God. It is ſaid in the text, to be *fooliſhneſs with God*. It is ſo in three reſpects: It is contemptible in God's ſight; it is baffled in its attempts by God; or, when its attempts are ſucceſsful, they are allowed to produce nothing but diſappointment and vanity.

FIRST, it is contemptible in God's ſight. Pleaſed and ſatisfied as the wiſe man of the world may be with himſelf, and

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and honoured as he may fancy himſelf to be by the multitude, let him be mortified with reflecting that, in the eye of him who is the Supreme Judge of all worth, his character is mean and wretched. That which God declares himſelf to love and honour, is *truth in the inward parts*; the fair, ſincere, and candid mind. He who *walketh uprightly and worketh righteouſneſs*, is the perſon who ſhall *abide in his tabernacle, and dwell in his holy hill.* When our bleſſed Lord deſigned to mark one of his followers with peculiar diſtinction and honour, he ſaid of him, *Behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom there is no guile* *. a character ſo directly the reverſe of worldly wiſdom, that from this circumſtance alone you may judge in what rank that wiſdom ſtood with him.

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But it is not only from the declarations of the Scripture, but from the whole courſe of Providence, that we learn the contempt in which God holds

* John, i. 47.

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the wiſdom of the world. Who were they on whom he conferred the higheſt marks of diſtinction which ever honoured mankind; whom he ſingled out to be the companions of Chriſt, the workers of miracles, the publiſhers of everlaſting happineſs to mankind? Were they the wiſe men of the world, the refined, and the political, who were employed as the inſtruments of God on this great occaſion? No: he choſe a few plain, ſimple, undeſigning men, in order to make fooliſh the *wiſdom of the world*, and by their means to overthrow the eſtabliſhments of the artful, the learned, and the mighty.——To this day, God in the courſe of his Providence beſtows thoſe external advantages which the men of the world ſo earneſtly purſue, with apparent diſregard of worldly wiſdom. He allows *no* fixed nor regular connexion to ſubſiſt between an artful political conduct, and riches, reputation, or honours; he allows them not this mark of value; he does not always give the race to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong, *nor* riches

riches to men of underſtanding; but on the contrary, ſcatters the advantages of fortune with a promiſcuous hand; and often allows them to be attained by the vileſt and loweſt of men, who neither by worldly wiſdom, nor any other talent whatever, had the ſmalleſt title to deſerve them.—Judge then, ye wiſe men of this world, whether your characters and purſuits be not moſt contemptible in God's ſight, when you behold thoſe ſpiritual bleſſings which he eſteems, withheld from you, and beſtowed only on the good and the pious; and thoſe worldly bleſſings which you covet, when at any time they are allowed to you, yet allowed only as a portion in common to you with the refuſe of mankind, with many characters ſo infamous that you yourſelves deſpiſe them? SERM. XVII.

In the ſecond place, the wiſdom of the world *is fooliſhneſs with God*, becauſe it is baffled by him. Some triumphs he has occaſionally allowed it to gain, in order to carry on ſome ſpecial purpoſe that his Providence had in view. Hence

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Hence a ſplendid conqueror, or a ſucceſsful conſpirator, dazzle at times the public eye, and attract imitators of their characters and exploits. But, if you extenſively conſult hiſtorical annals, and much more, if you will attentively conſider what is known to happen in private life, you will find the examples to be few and rare, of wicked, unprincipled men attaining fully the accompliſhment of their crafty deſigns.—It is true, that the juſtice of Heaven is not, in the preſent ſtate, fully manifeſted, by rendering to every man according to his deeds. But I believe it will be found by attentive obſervers, that there are two caſes in which, perhaps more than in any other, the divine government has, throughout all ages, rendered itſelf apparent and ſenſible to men. Theſe are, humbling the high imaginations of the proud, and taking the wiſe in their own craftineſs. By many ſignal inſtances of the intervention of Providence in both theſe caſes, God hath deeply marked the traces of an awful government, even in this introductory ſtate; and

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and forced a reverence of his juſtice upon the minds of men. As he will not permit any greatneſs to lift itſelf up againſt his power, ſo neither will he permit any art to prevail againſt his counſels. While the crafty project many a diſtant plan, and wind their way moſt warily and cunningly, as they think, to ſucceſs; how often does the Almighty, by means of ſome ſlight and ſeemingly contingent event, ſtop the wheel at once from farther motion, and leave them to the bitterneſs of humbling diſappointment? *He that ſitteth in the heavens ſhall laugh; the Lord ſhall have them in deriſion. Then*, it is immediately added, *ſhall he ſpeak to them in wrath, and vex them in ſore diſpleaſure* *. The edifice of crooked policy which they had erected againſt his decree, was an edifice of duſt: no ſooner does he blow upon it with the breath of his mouth, than it falls to the ground. *The wicked are ſnared in their own devices. They are caught in the pit which their hands had digged. This is the purpoſe that is pur-* SERM. XVII.

* Pſal. ii. 4, 5.

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poſed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is ſtretched out upon all the nations!*

In the third place the wiſdom of the world is *fooliſhneſs with God*; becauſe, though it ſhould be allowed by Providence to run, without diſturbance, its fulleſt career, and to compaſs ſucceſsfully whatever it had projected, yet it can produce nothing in the iſſue, worthy of the purſuit of a truly wiſe man. It is a wiſdom which over-reaches and counteracts itſelf; and inſtead of expected happineſs, ends in miſery.—If the exiſtence of another world be admitted, can he be accounted wiſe, who frames his conduct ſolely with a view to this world, and beyond it has nothing to look for but puniſhment? Is he a wiſe man, who exchanges that which is eternal, for that which is temporary; and though it were to gain the whole world, expoſes himſelf to loſe his own ſoul?——But laying another world out of the queſtion, taking things on the footing of this life only, ſtill

* Iſaiah, xiv. 26.

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it can be clearly ſhown, that the crooked wiſdom of the world is no better than fooliſhneſs. For what is the amount of all that this wiſe man hath gained, or can gain, after all the toil he has undergone, and all the ſacrifices he has made, in order to attain ſucceſs? He has ſupplanted a rival; he has defeated an enemy; he has obtained, perhaps, a ſplendid eſtabliſhment for himſelf and his family. But how is all this ſucceſs enjoyed? with a mind often ill at eaſe; with a character dubious at the beſt, ſuſpected by the world in general, ſeen through by the judicious and diſcerning. For the man of the world flatters himſelf in vain, if he imagines that by the plauſible appearances of his behaviour, he can thoroughly conceal from the world what he is, and keep them ignorant of the hollow principles upon which he has acted. For a ſhort time the world may be deceived; but after a man has continued for a while to act his part upon the public ſtage, and has been tried by the different occurences of life, his real character never fails

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to be discovered. The judgment of the public on the character of men, as to their worth, probity, and honour, seldom errs. In the mean time, the advantages of fortune or station, which the man of the world has gained, after having been enjoyed for a while, become insipid to him; their first relish is gone, and he has little more to expect. He finds himself embarrassed with cares and fears. He is sensible that by many he is envied and hated; and though surrounded by low flatterers, is conscious that he is destitute of real friends. As he advances in years, all the enjoyments of his troubled prosperity are diminished more and more, and with many apprehensions he looks forward to the decline of life.

Compute now, O wise man, as thou art! what thou hast acquired by all thy selfish and intricate wisdom, by all thy refined and double conduct, thy dark and designing policy? Canst thou say that thy mind is satisfied with thy past tenor of conduct? Has thy real happiness kept pace, in any degree, with the success

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success of thy worldly plans, or the advancement of thy fortune? Are thy days more cheerful and gay, or are thy nights more calm and free of care, than those of the plain and upright man, whom thou hast so often treated with scorn? To thine own conscience I appeal, whether thou darest say, that ought which thou hast gained by the wisdom of the world, be a sufficient compensation for incurring the displeasure of thy Creator, for forfeiting self-approbation within thy breast, for losing the esteem of the wisest and worthiest part of mankind around thee?— *How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after lies?* SERM. XVII.

FROM what has been said of the nature and the effects of worldly wisdom, you will now judge how justly it is termed *foolishness with God*, and how much it merits the severe epithets which are given it in Scripture, of *earthly*,

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ſenſual, and deviliſh. Oppoſite to it ſtands the *wiſdom that is from above*, which is aſcribed by an apoſtle, as *pure, peaceable, gentle, and eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy* *.— This, and this only, is that real wiſdom, which it is both our duty and our intereſt to cultivate. It carries every character of being far ſuperior to the wiſdom of the world. It is maſculine and generous; it is magnanimous and brave; it is uniform and conſiſtent. The wiſe man of the world is obliged to ſhape and form his courſe according to the changing occurrences of the world; he is unſteady and perplexed; he trembles at every poſſible conſequence, and is ever looking to futurity with a troubled mind. But the wiſe man in God's ſight, moves in a higher ſphere. His integrity directs his courſe without perplexity or trouble. He enquires only what is right, becoming, and honourable for him to do. Being

* James, iii. 15. 17.

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ſatisfied as to this, he aſks no farther queſtions. The iſſue it is not in his power to direct; but the part which is aſſigned to him, he will act; ſecure, that come what will, in life and death, the Providence of that God whom he ſerves, will effectually guard all his great intereſts. At the ſame time, the ſpirit of this wiſdom is perfectly conſiſtent with proper foreſight, and vigilant attention. It is oppoſed to art and cunning, not to prudence and caution. It is the mark, not of a weak and improvident, but of a great and noble mind; which will in no event take refuge in falſehood and diſſimulation; which ſcorns deceit, becauſe it holds it to be mean and baſe; and ſeeks no diſguiſe, becauſe it needs none to hide it.—Such a character is both amiable and venerable. While it ennobles the magiſtrate and the judge, and adds honour and dignity to the moſt exalted ſtations, it commands reſpect in every rank of life. When the memory of artful and crooked policy

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policy ſpeedily ſinks, and is extinguiſhed, this true wiſdom ſhall long preſerve an honourable memorial among men, and from God ſhall receive everlaſting glory.

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SERMON XVIII.

On the GOVERNMENT of HUMAN AFFAIRS by PROVIDENCE.

PROVERBS, xvi. 9.

A man's heart deviſeth his way; but the Lord directeth his ſteps.

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MANY devices there are, and much exerciſe of thought and counſel ever going on among mankind. When we look abroad into the world, we behold a very buſy and active ſcene; a great multitude always in motion, actuated by a variety of paſſions, and engaged in the proſecution of many different deſigns, where they commonly flatter

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flatter themſelves with the proſpect of ſucceſs. But, much of this labour we behold at the ſame time falling to the ground. *The race is far from being always to the ſwift, or the battle to the ſtrong, or riches to men of underſtanding.* It plainly appears, that the efforts of our activity, how great ſoever they may be, are ſubject to the controul of a ſuperior inviſible power; to that Providence of Heaven which works by ſecret and imperceptible, but irreſiſtible means. Higher counſels than ours, are concerned in the iſſues of human conduct. Deeper and more extenſive plans, of which nothing is known to us, are carried on above. The line is let out, to allow us to run a certain length; but by that line we are all the while inviſibly held, and are recalled and checked at the pleaſure of Heaven.—Such being now the condition of man on earth, let us conſider what inſtruction this ſtate of things is fitted to afford us. I ſhall firſt illuſtrate a little farther the poſition in the text, that though a *man's heart may deviſe his way, it is the Lord who directeth his*

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his ſteps; and then point out the practical improvement to be made of this doctrine. SERM. XVIII.

AMONG all who admit the exiſtence of a Deity, it has been a general belief that he exerciſes ſome government over human affairs. It appeared altogether contrary to reaſon, to ſuppoſe that after God had erected this ſtupendous fabric of the univerſe, had beautified it with ſo much ornament, and peopled it with ſuch a multitude of rational beings, he ſhould then have thrown it out from his care, as a deſpiſed, neglected offspring, and allowed its affairs to float about at random. There was indeed one ſet of ancient philoſophers who adopted this abſurd opinion; but though they nominally allowed the exiſtence of ſome beings whom they called gods, yet as they aſcribed to them neither the creation nor the government of the world, they were held to be in reality Atheiſts.

In what manner Providence interpoſes in human affairs; by what means it influences the thoughts and counſels of men, and, notwithſtanding the influence

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fluence it exerts, leaves to them the freedom of will and choice, are subjects of dark and mysterious nature, and which have given occasion to many an intricate controversy. Let us remember, that the manner in which God influences the motion of all the heavenly bodies, the nature of that secret power by which he is ever directing the sun and the moon, the planets, stars, and comets, in their course through the heavens, while they appear to move themselves in a free course, are matters no less inexplicable to us, than the manner in which he influences the counsels of men. But though the mode of divine operation remains unknown, the fact of an overruling influence is equally certain in the moral, as it is in the natural world. In cases where the fact is clearly authenticated, we are not at liberty to call its truth in question, merely because we understand not the manner in which it is brought about. Nothing can be more clear from the testimony of Scripture, than that God takes part in all that happens among mankind; directing

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directing and overruling the whole course of events so as to make every one of them answer the designs of his wise and righteous government. This is distinctly and explicity asserted in the text. Throughout all the sacred writing, God is represented as on every occasion, by various dispensations of his Providence, rewarding the righteous, or chastening them according as his wisdom requires, and punishing the wicked. We cannot indeed conceive God acting as the governor of the world at all, unless his government were to extend to all the events that happen. It is upon the supposition of a particular Providence, that our worship and prayers to him are founded. All his perfections would be utterly insignificant to us, if they were not exercised on every occasion, according as the circumstances of his creatures required. The Almighty would then be no more than an unconcerned spectator of the behaviour of his subjects, regarding the obedient and the rebellious with an equal eye.

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It were needleſs to proſecute any farther the argument in favour of a particular Providence. The experience of every one muſt, more or leſs, bear teſtimony to it. We need not for this purpoſe have recourſe to thoſe ſudden and unexpected viciſſitudes, which have ſometimes aſtoniſhed whole nations, and drawn their attention to the conſpicuous hand of Heaven. We need not appeal to the hiſtory of the ſtateſman and the warrior; of the ambitious and the enterprizing. We confine our obſervation to thoſe whoſe lives have been moſt plain and ſimple, and who had no deſire to depart from the ordinary train of conduct.—In how many inſtances, my friends, have you found, that you are held in ſubjection to a higher Power, on whom depends the accompliſhment of your wiſhes and deſigns? Fondly you had projected ſome favourite plan. You thought that you had forecaſt, and provided for all that might happen. You had taken your meaſures with ſuch vigilant prudence, that on every ſide you ſeemed to yourſelf perfectly guarded and ſecure. But,

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But, lo! ſome little event hath come about, unforeſeen by you, and in its conſequences, at the firſt ſeemingly inconſiderable, which yet hath turned the whole courſe of things into a new direction, and blaſted all your hopes. At other times, your counſels and plans have been permitted to ſucceed. You then applauded your own wiſdom, and ſat down to feaſt on the happineſs you had attained.—To your ſurpriſe you found, that happineſs was not there; and that God's decree had appointed it to be only vanity. We labour for proſperity, and obtain it not. Unexpected, it is ſometimes made to drop upon us, as of its own accord. The happineſs of man depends on ſecret ſprings, too nice and delicate to be adjuſted by human art. It requires a favourable combination of external circumſtances with the ſtate of his own mind. To accompliſh on every occaſion ſuch a combination, is far beyond his power; but it is what God can at all times effect; as the whole ſeries of external cauſes are arranged according to his pleaſure, and the hearts of all men are in SERM. XVIII.

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in his hands, *to turn them whereſoever he wills, as rivers of water.* From the imperfection of our knowledge to aſcertain what is good for us, and from the defect of our power to bring about that good when known, ariſe all thoſe diſappointments which continually teſtify, that the *way of man is not in himſelf;* that he is not the maſter of his own lot; that though he may *deviſe*, it is God who *directs*; God, who can make the ſmalleſt incident an effectual inſtrument of his Providence for overturning the moſt laboured plans of men.

Accident, and chance, and fortune, are words which we often hear mentioned, and much is aſcribed to them in the life of man. But they are words without meaning; or, as far as they have any ſignification, they are no other than names for the unknown operations of Providence. For it is certain, that in God's univerſe nothing comes to paſs cauſeleſsly, or in vain. Every event has its own determined direction. That chaos of human affairs and intrigues, where we can ſee no light;

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light; that mass of disorder and confusion which they often present to our view, is all clearness and order in the sight of Him who is governing and directing all, and bringing forward every event in its due time and place. *The Lord sitteth on the flood. The Lord maketh the wrath of man to praise him,* as he maketh the *hail and the rain obey his word. He hath prepared his throne, in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.* SERM. XVIII.

HAVING illustrated the doctrine of the text, I proceed to show how it is to be improved by us. I must begin with warning you, that the doctrine I have illustrated has no tendency to supercede counsel, design, or a proper exertion of the active powers of man. Because Providence is superior to us, it does not follow that therefore man has no part to act; or because our industry is sometimes disappointed, that therefore it is always vain. It is by the use of ordinary means, that Providence, for

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for the moſt part, accompliſhes its deſigns. Man *deviſing his own way*, and carrying on his own plans, has a place in the order of means which Providence employs. To exertions therefore of his own, he is called by God. His Maker framed him for action; and then only he is happy, when in action he is properly employed. To ſupine idleneſs, to a vain and preſumptuous truſt in Providence, while we neglect what is incumbent on us to perform, no encouragement is given in Scripture; on the contrary, threatenings are denounced againſt it. But the doctrine of the text is to be improved,

In the firſt place, for correcting anxious and immoderate care about the future events of our life. This anxiety is the ſource of much ſin, and therefore is often rebuked in Scripture, as alienating the mind from God, and from the higher objects of virtue and religion, and filling the heart with

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with paſſions which both annoy and corrupt it. If it be the parent of much ſin, it is certainly alſo the offspring of great folly. For in ſuch a ſtate as human life has juſt now been repreſented to be, what means this mighty buſtle and ſtir, this reſtleſs perturbation of thought and care, as if all the iſſues of futurity reſted wholly on our conduct? ——Something depends upon thyſelf; and there is reaſon, upon this account, for acting thy part with prudence and attention. But upon a hand unſeen it depends, either to overturn all thy projects, or to crown them with ſucceſs; and therefore, when the iſſue is ſo uncertain, thine attention ſhould never run into immoderate care. By diſquieting thyſelf ſo much about futurity, thou takeſt upon thy ſhoulders a load which is not thine, and which indeed thou art unable to bear. SERM. XVIII.

The folly of ſuch anxiety is aggravated by this conſideration, that all events are under a much better and wiſer direction than we could place them. Perhaps that evil which we have dreaded

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so much in prospect, may never be suffered to arrive. Providence may either have turned into a quite different course, that black cloud which appeared to carry the storm; or before the storm burst, our heads may be laid so low as to be out of its reach. Perhaps, also, the storm may be permitted to come upon us, and yet under its dark wings may bring to us some secret and unexpected good. *Who knoweth what is good for man all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* Who knoweth this, my brethren, except God? And who consulteth it so effectually as He who by his infinite wisdom *maketh all things work together for good to them who love him?* Is it not, then, our greatest happiness, that when *man deviseth, God directeth?* Is it not far better for us than if the case were reversed; if the all wise God were only ineffectually to devise, and man, blind, and ignorant, and rash as he is, were to have the full direction of his own steps?— Wherefore vex not thyself in vain. To the unavoidable evils of life, add not this

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this evil of thine own procuring, a tormenting anxiety about the ſucceſs of thy deſigns. The great rule both of religion and wiſdom is, Do thy duty, and leave the iſſue to Heaven. *Commit the way unto the Lord.* Act thy part fairly, and as wiſely as thou canſt, for thine apparent intereſt: and then, with a ſteady and untroubled mind, wait for what God ſhall ſee meet to appoint. This is wiſdom: all beyond this is vanity and folly. SERM. XVIII.

In the ſecond place, the doctrine of the text is calculated not only to repreſs anxiety, but to enforce moderation of mind in every ſtate; it humbles the pride of proſperity, and prevents that deſpair which is incident to adverſity.—The preſumption of proſperity is the ſource both of vices and miſchiefs innumerable. It renders men forgetful of God and religion. It intoxicates them with the love, and immerſes them in the indulgence of pleaſure. It hardens their hearts to the diſtreſſes of their brethren. Now, conſider, how little ground

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the real ſituation of the moſt proſperous man affords for this vain elation of mind. He is dependent every moment on the pleaſure of a ſuperior; and knows not, but Providence may be juſt preparing for him the moſt unforeſeen reverſes. Shall he *boaſt himſelf of to-morrow*, who *knoweth not what a day may bring forth?* He hath perhaps ſaid in his heart, *my mountain ſtands ſtrong;* I ſhall never be moved. But God needeth only to *hide his face*, and preſently *he is troubled.* That little eminence on which he ſtood, and from which he ſurveyed with pride his fellow creatures below him, was no more than an eminence of duſt. The Almighty blows upon it with the breath of his mouth, and it is ſcattered. Belongs it to him whoſe tenure of proſperity is ſo inſecure, to utter the voice of contempt, or to lift the rod of oppreſſion over his fellows, when over his own head is ſtretched that high arm of Heaven, which levels, at one touch, the mighty with the low?

The government of God is accompanied with this ſignal advantage, that

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once it humbles the proud, and revives the diſtreſſed. As long as we believe in one higher than the higheſt, to whom all muſt look up, the greateſt man is taught to be modeſt, and to feel his dependence; and the loweſt man has an object of continual reſource and hope. Injured by men, he can fly to that righteous governor who rules the earth, and, from his interpoſition, hope for better days. Providence is the great ſanctuary to the afflicted who maintain their integrity. Conſolation they always find in the belief of it; and often there has iſſued from this ſanctuary the moſt ſeaſonable relief. There iſſues from it, at all times, this voice of comfort; *Truſt in the Lord and do good; and ſo thou ſhalt dwell in the Land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed**. Thine enemies may conſpire; *the Heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. But he that ſitteth in the heavens ſhall laugh; the Lord ſhall hold them in deriſion.* For the Lord is *the keeper of Iſrael;* he is the *ſhield of the righteous. As the* SERM. XVIII.

* Pſalm, xxxvii. 3.

mountains

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SERM. XVIII. *mountains are round about Jeruſalem, ſo the Lord is round about his people from henceforth and for ever*.*

In the third place, the doctrine that has been illuſtrated of the interpoſal of Providence in all human affairs, places the vanity and folly of all ſinful plans in a very ſtrong light.—All ſin, in every view of it, muſt be attended with danger. He who embarks in any unjuſt or criminal enterprize, beſides the manifeſt peril to his own ſoul, incurs the riſque of his character being diſcovered, and of meeting with hatred, contempt, and juſt reſentment from the world. One would think that when the conſequences on one ſide are ſo dangerous, the bribe on the other ſide muſt be very high, and the proſpect of ſucceſs very fair and promiſing. Now, conſider how this matter truly ſtands. The ſinner hath againſt him, firſt, that general uncertainty which I before ſhewed to take place in all the deſigns

* Pſalm, cxxv. 2.

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and projects formed by men. Could the moſt artful and beſt deviſed means always enſure ſucceſs to the end we ſought to obtain, ſome apology might then be made for departing occaſionally from the path of rectitude. But it is far from being true, that any ſuch road to ſure ſucceſs can, on any occaſion, be found. On the contrary, we every day ſee the moſt plauſible and beſt concerted plans baffled and thrown to the ground; and there is nothing which on many occaſions has been more remarked, than Providence ſeeming to make ſport of the wiſdom of man. SERM. XVIII.

This view of things alone were ſufficient to ſhow to the ſinner the inſecurity and danger of the ſyſtem on which he acts. But there is much more againſt him than this. For he, by his guilty plans, hath engaged againſt himſelf one certain and moſt formidable enemy, to whom he hath great reaſon to look up with terror. He cannot poſſibly believe that the righteous Governor of the univerſe, beholds with an equal eye the deſigns of the virtuous who honour him,

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him, and the deſigns of the guilty who deſpiſe his laws, and do injuſtice to his ſervants. No; againſt theſe latter, Providence hath pointed its darts, hath bent its bow in the heavens; *the face of the Lord is againſt them that do evil**. Other deſigns may fail; but thoſe of the wicked, God is concerned in overthrowing. It is true, that this life is not the ſeaſon of rendering to every man according to his works. But though retribution does not on every occaſion take place at preſent, yet neither is the exerciſe of divine juſtice always delayed. The hiſtory of the world is continually furniſhing us with examples of the wicked *taken in their own devices*; of the crafty *ſnared in the works of their own hands*; of ſinners *falling into the pit which themſelves had digged*. How often when ſignal crimes were ready to be perpetrated, hath God remarkably interpoſed; hath ſpread his ſhield before the juſt, unnerved the arm of the aſſaſſin, or ſtruck a ſudden damp into his

* Pſalm xxxiv. 16.

mind

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mind at the critical moment?—Obnoxious then as the sinner is to so many dangers; exposed perpetually to the disappointment of his designs by the uncertainty of human events; exposed, over and above, to the avenging interposition of Heaven; what strange infatuation has tempted him to depart from the plain and safe path of integrity? SERM. XVIII.

In the last place, from all that has been said on this subject, we clearly see how much it concerns us to perform those duties which a proper regard to Providence requires, and to obtain protection from that power which directeth and disposeth all. A more incontrovertible axiom there cannot be than this, that if man only deviseth his way, while God overrules his devices and directs his steps, an interest in God's favour is far more important than all the wisdom and ability of man. Without his favour, the wisest will be disappointed and baffled; under his protection and guidance, the simple are led in a plain and sure path.—In vain would

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would the giddy and profane, throw Providence out of their thoughts, and affect to think and act, as if all depended on themſelves. This boldneſs of ſelf-ſufficiency is affectation, and no more. For, moments there are, when the man of ſtouteſt heart feels the ſtrong ſubjection under which he is held, and would gladly graſp at the aid of Heaven. As long as human affairs proceed in a ſmooth train, without any alarming preſages of change or danger, the man of the world may remain pleaſed with himſelf, and be fully confident in his own powers. But whoſe life continues long ſo undiſturbed? Let any uncommon violence ſhake the elements around him, and threaten him with deſtruction; let the aſpect of public affairs be ſo lowering as to forebode ſome great calamity; or in his private concerns, let ſome ſudden change arrive to ſhatter his fortune, or let ſickneſs, and the harbingers of approaching death, ſhow him his frailty; and how ready will he then be to ſend up prayers from the heart, that Providence would befriend

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befriend and relieve him? Religion, my friends, is not a matter of theory and doubt. Its foundations are laid deep in the nature and condition of man. It lays hold of every man's feelings. In every man's heart and conscience it has many witnesses to its importance and reality. SERM. XVIII.

Let us then neglect no means which may be of avail for procuring the grace and favour of that divine Providence on which so much depends. Let no duties be overlooked which belong to us as subjects of God; devout worship, and grateful praises for all his blessings; humble trust in his goodness, and implicit submission to his will; and constant and cheerful obedience to his laws. Let us be thankful that God hath clearly made known all that he requires of us in order to be accepted in his sight; and that not only he has revealed the rule of duty, but also hath pointed out to us in the gospel, the direct method of reconciliation with him, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Providence hath condescended to become our instructor

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inſtructor in this great article; hath taught us in what way our ſins may be forgiven, our imperfect ſervices be accepted, and an intereſt in the divine grace be attained by means of our Redeemer. Inexcuſable we muſt be, if all this offered grace we ſhall wantonly throw at our feet. In a world ſo full of viciſſitudes and uncertainty, let us take pains to ſecure to ourſelves one reſting place; one habitation that cannot be moved. By piety and prayer, by faith, repentance, and a good life, let us ſeek the friendſhip of the Moſt High; ſo ſhall he who *directeth the ſteps of man* now, conduct our path in ſuch a courſe as ſhall bring us in the end to himſelf.

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SERMON XIX.

On PRAYER.

PSALM. lxv. 2

O Thou that heareſt prayer, unto Thee ſhall all fleſh come!

SERM. XIX.

THE Supreme Being is repreſented under many amiable characters in the ſacred writings; as the *Father of Mercies*, the *God of Love*, the *Author of every good and perfect gift.* But there is no character which carries more comfort, or which renders God ſo properly the object of confidence and truſt, as this, of his being the *Hearer of Prayer.* This view of the Almighty accommodates his perfections to our neceſſities and wants, and in our preſent frail and diſtreſſed ſtate affords a conſtant

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ſtant refuge to which we can fly. *Unto Thee ſhall all fleſh come.* To Thee, ſhall an indigent world look up for the ſupply of their wants; to Thee, ſhall the proudeſt ſinner, at ſome time or other, be compelled to bow; to Thee, ſhall the diſtreſſed and afflicted have recourſe, as to their laſt relief and hope.

Prayer is a duty eſſential to natural religion. Wherever the light of nature taught men to acknowledge the being of a God, to that God alſo it directed them to pray. In the Chriſtian revelation great ſtreſs is laid upon this duty, and great encouragement given to it. Our bleſſed Saviour not only ſet the example himſelf, and enjoined the practice to his followers, but thought it worthy his expreſs inſtruction to teach them in what manner to pray, and even to put words in their mouth. We are aſſured that prayers are not in vain; but that as *the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous*, ſo *his ears are open to their cry*; that if we aſk aright, *we ſhall receive*; *if we ſeek, we ſhall find*; *if we knock, it ſhall be opened to us.* It is, indeed,

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deed, hard to say, whether prayer is to be most properly considered as a duty incumbent on all, or as a privilege allowed to them. But a blessed circumstance it is, that our duty and our privilege thus concur in one; that we are commanded to do what our wants naturally dictate to be done; even to ask what is good from God, who *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.*— In treating of this subject, it will be proper to consider first, the nature and the subjects of prayer; next, its proper qualifications; and lastly, the advantages and blessings which attend it. SERM. XIX.

I. The Nature of Prayer supposes, in the first place, that we have a just sense of our own wants and miseries, and of our dependence on God for relief. To be suitably impressed with this sense, we need only think what our present situation is. We live in a world where every thing around us is dark and uncertain. When we look back on the past, we must remember that there we have met with much disappointment

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appointment and vanity. When we look forward to the future, all is unknown. We are liable there to many dangers which we cannot foreſee; and to many which we foreſee approaching, yet know not how to defend ourſelves againſt them. We are often ignorant what courſe we can ſteer with ſafety; nay, ſo imperfect is our own wiſdom, and ſo great the darkneſs which covers futurity, that while we imagine that we are *in* the road to proſperity, we are often ruſhing blindly into the moſt fatal evils.—Beſides theſe contingencies of life, which make us feel ſo deeply the neceſſity of looking up to ſome more powerful Guide and Protector, there are other circumſtances in our ſtate which lead to reflections ſtill more alarming. We know that we are the ſubjects of a ſupreme righteous Governor, to whom we are accountable for our conduct. We were ſent into this world by his appointment

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ment, and we are removed from it at his decree. How soon the call for our removal may be given, none of us know; but this we profess to believe, that upon our going hence we are to be brought into new and unknown habitations, suitable to our behaviour here. Who amongst us can say that he is perfectly ready to appear before his Creator and Judge, and to give an account to him for all the actions of his life? How much do the best of us stand in need of mercy and forgiveness for our offences past, and of direction and assistance from Heaven to guide us in our future way? What reason to dread that if we be left entirely to ourselves, we will be in the utmost danger of departing from virtue and from happiness, and of leaving life under the displeasure of Him who is to judge us?—While with this sense of our imperfections, our dangers, and our guilt, we come to the Hearer of prayer, we must, in the next place, SERM. XIX.

Pray to God, in the belief that with him there is power which can give us relief, and goodness which will incline

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SERM. XIX.

him to give it. Prayer ſuppoſes a full perſuaſion that his Providence rules and governs all; that through all futurity his eye penetrates; that there are no events of our life in which he interpoſes not; that he knows the moſt ſecret motions of our hearts; and that to the hearts of all men he has acceſs, by avenues unknown to us, and can turn them according to his pleaſure. It ſuppoſes, at the ſame time, a firm confidence in the declarations he has made in his word, that a plan is eſtabliſhed for diſpenſing grace to fallen and guilty mankind, through a great Redeemer. It ſuppoſes a humble hope that, as he *knows our frame and remembers we are duſt*, he will not reject the ſupplications of the penitent returning ſinner; that he is one who hath no pleaſure in our ſorrows and diſtreſs, but deſires the happineſs of his creatures, and beholds with complacency the humble and ſincere worſhipper.

Now theſe things being ſuppoſed, this juſt ſenſe of our own imperfections and guilt, and this proper impreſſion

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preſſion of the divine nature, when the ſoul is in this poſture of devotion, breathing forth its ſorrows and its wants before its Creator, and imploring from him protection and aid, it cannot but give vent to the high conceptions with which it will then be affected, of God's ſupreme perfection. This of courſe becomes the foundation of that part of devotion which is ſtyled adoration or praiſe.—As it is the experience of paſt goodneſs which warms the heart of the worſhipper, and encourages his preſent ſupplication, he will naturally be led to a grateful celebration of the mercies of Heaven; whence thankſgiving becomes an eſſential part of his devotion.—As he cannot put up petitions without acknowledging his wants, and as his wants are cloſely connected with his frailty and ill-deſerving, hence the moſt humble confeſſion of guilt muſt neceſſarily enter into prayer.—If there be any terms on which we may expect the Deity to be moſt propitious; if there be any meritorious Interceſſor through whom we may prefer our re- SERM. XIX.

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queſt to him, this aſſuredly will be the method which the pious worſhipper will chuſe for addreſſing the Almighty; and this will be the ground of his praying in the name of Chriſt, ſending up his petitions to God through his beloved Son, whom he heareth always.

Thus it appears that there is a juſt foundation for prayer in all its parts, naturally laid in the preſent circumſtances of man, and in the relation in which he ſtands to God. But as petition is the chief and moſt diſtinguiſhing part of prayer, it will be requiſite that we conſider particularly what thoſe requeſts are, which are proper to be offered up to God. Theſe may all be claſſed under three heads: firſt, requeſts for temporal bleſſings; next, for ſpiritual mercies; and laſtly, interceſſions for the welfare of others.

With regard to temporal bleſſings, though men may lay a reſtraint upon themſelves in the expreſſions which they utter in prayer, yet it is much to be ſuſpected, that the inward wiſhes of their hearts for ſuch bleſſings are often the

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the moſt fervent of any. To wiſh and pray for the advantages of life, is not forbidden. Our Saviour hath ſo far countenanced it, as to command us to pray that God would *give us our daily bread*; that is, as his words have been always underſtood, that he would beſtow what is neceſſary for the ſuſtenance and comfort of life. Yet the very ſound of the words retrenches every ſuperfluous and extravagant wiſh. Not for riches and honours, for great advancement or long life, or for numerous and flouriſhing families, has he given us any encouragement to pray. Foreign are ſuch things to the real improvement, foreign very often to the true happineſs of man. Fooliſhly they may be wiſhed for, when the wiſh accompliſhed would prove our ruin. Let health and peace, contentment and tranquillity, bound the humble prayer which we ſend up to Heaven; that God may *feed us with food convenient for us*; that whatever our outward circumſtances are, they may be bleſſed to us by him, and accompanied with a quiet mind. Even health SERM. XIX.

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and peace themſelves may not always prove bleſſings. Sweet and deſirable as they ſeem, God may, at certain times, foreſee their tendency to corrupt our hearts, and may, in mercy, reject a prayer for them, which, on our part, may be allowably put up. For the nature of all temporal things is ſuch, that they have not one fixed and ſtable character, but may be convertible on different occaſions either into good or ill; and therefore, ſome reſerve in our wiſh muſt always be maintained; and to the wiſer judgment of God, it muſt be left to determine what is fit to be beſtowed, and what to be withheld.——But this we may lawfully pray, that, as far as to God ſeems meet, he would make our ſtate comfortable, and our days eaſy and tranquil; that he would ſave us from falling into any ſevere and extreme diſtreſs; that he would preſerve to us the enjoyment of thoſe friends and comforts that we moſt love; or if he bereave us of any of them, that he would in mercy aſſiſt and ſupport us under the loſs; in fine, that he would

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ſo order our lot, that we may be kept as free from pain, trouble, and anguiſh, as ſhall be conſiſtent with the higher improvements of our ſouls, in piety, virtue, and wiſdom.

In the next place, with regard to ſpiritual mercies, we are unqueſtionably allowed to be more fervent and explicit in our requeſts at the throne of grace. God can never be diſpleaſed in hearing us implore from him thoſe graces and endowments of the ſoul, that beautify us in his ſight, that are good for all men, good at all times, indeed the only certain and immutable goods; and therefore to theſe only pertains that earneſtneſs, that urgency of prayer, which is repreſented as acceptable to the Almighty.——Our petitions of this nature, our Saviour has ranked under the two great heads, of forgiveneſs for paſt offences, and deliverance from future temptations. It is chiefly for theſe important bleſſings, that we are to proſtrate ourſelves before our Father in Heaven, begging of him, who knows our heart with all its frailties,

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frailties, that he would accept our ſincere repentance, and pardon our errors for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt. We muſt earneſtly pray, that he would ſtrengthen us by his grace to reſiſt the temptations that hereafter may aſſault us; and whatever he appoint to befal us without, may enable us to preſerve a good conſcience within; that he may teach us to know ourſelves, and aſſiſt us to control and govern our paſſions; that he may endow us with temperance in proſperity, and reſignation under adverſity; that in no ſituation of life we may be allowed to forget what we owe to our Maker and Redeemer; and that after having diſcharged the duties of life, through the aſſiſtance of Divine grace, with ſome meaſure of integrity and honour, we may be prepared for going through the laſt ſcene of life without diſmay; and when we have made a decent and peaceful retreat from this world, we may then find ourſelves in ſome better and happier ſtate.

In the laſt place, it is to be remembered

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bered that intercessions for the welfare of others form a material part of prayer. The sincere worshipper is not to consider himself as a single and separate being, confining his concern wholly to himself. Our Saviour has initiated us into a more noble and enlarged spirit of devotion, when he taught us to begin with praying that the kingdom of God may be advanced over all, and that mankind may be rendered as happy by doing his will, as the angels are in heaven. When we bow our knee to the common Father, let it be like affectionate members of his family desiring the prosperity of all our brethren. In particular, the happiness of our friends and relations, of those whom we love, and by whom we are loved, ought then to be near our heart; praying that the Almighty may be our God, and the God of our friends and family, for ever; that he may watch over them, and bless them; and may make us long happy in mutual comfort and affection. We ought to remember our benefactors before God, and pray for a return of divine blessings

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ings on their head. The diſtreſſed and afflicted ought to ſhare our ſympathy; remembering them *who ſuffer adverſity, as being ourſelves in the body*; and ſhedding the friendly tear at the thought of human woe. Our enemies themſelves ought not to be forgotten in our prayers: in fine, our prayers ought to be an exerciſe of extenſive benevolence of heart; a ſolemn teſtimony offered up to the God of Love, of our kind and charitable affection to all men.

But now, after what has been ſuggeſted concerning the proper ſubjects of prayer, I am aware that it may be ſaid by ſome, To what purpoſe is all this detail?—Do we propoſe, by our prayers, to give to the Supreme Being any new information, regarding our ſituation, of which he is not poſſeſſed? Does He not already know all our wants and diſtreſſes; and will He not be prompted by his goodneſs and wiſdom to do for us in ſuch circumſtances, whatever is fit and proper to be done? Do we imagine that, by the importunity

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nity of our ſolicitations and requeſts, SERM. XIX.
He can be prevailed upon to alter his purpoſe, or depart from his ſyſtem in the government of the world, in order to gratify our deſires?—Such objections againſt the reaſonableneſs of prayer, have been often urged with all the parade of ſcepticiſm. Though, on the firſt view, they may carry ſome appearance of ſpeciouſneſs, yet on a ſlight diſcuſſion they fall to the ground; for they all reſt on a miſtaken idea of the nature and deſign of prayer. No man in his ſober ſenſes could ever believe that, by lifting his feeble voice to Heaven, he could convey to the ear of the Almighty any new knowledge or information. None but the moſt ignorant could imagine, that, by his prayers he could raiſe any new emotions in the unchangeable Sovereign of the univerſe, and prevail upon him to alter his decrees in conſequence of his requeſts.—The efficacy of prayer lies, not in working a change upon God, but in working a change upon ourſelves; in begetting or improving right diſpoſitions of heart, and thereby making us fit ſubjects of the Divine

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Divine Mercy. It is not for the ſake of our aſking, that God grants the requeſts we prefer in prayer; but as our aſking, with proper diſpoſitions, produces that frame of mind which qualifies us to receive.—Hence prayer has been appointed by God as an inſtrument for improving our nature, and is required on our part as a condition of receiving his favours. Thus, when upon a certain occaſion he had by his Prophet predicted and promiſed circumſtances of proſperity to the Jewiſh nation, the Prophet was directed to add, *Thus ſaith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael to do it for them**.—Is there any one who will ſay, that it is not incumbent on all rational creatures to feel their dependence on the God who has formed them, and to refer to him all the bleſſings which they either enjoy or hope to receive? Would not the want of ſuch becoming ſentiments be altogether unworthy and ſinful? And if they are

* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 37.

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such sentiments as ought to be entertained, must it not be proper to express them by words in prayer, and thereby to strengthen the impression of them on our minds? SERM. XIX.

But in truth there is no occasion for entering into any long discussion of argument in order to evince the reasonableness of prayer. It is the natural dictate of the human heart. Though in the days of prosperity and ease it may, like other duties, have been neglected and forgotten, yet on all great and trying occasions, men are prompted by an irresistible impulse to lift their eyes, and address their voice to Heaven. Who is there, for instance, that feeling himself cruelly oppressed by injustice and violence, without any prospect of procuring redress, can forbear appealing to a Power that rules above, and invoking Divine interposition to vindicate his innocence, and avenge his wrongs? Who that is standing by the death-bed of a beloved friend, of a spouse, a brother, or a son, and sees them struggling with the last agonies, but finds himself impelled to look up to

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to Heaven, and to pray from the heart, that where men can give no aid, God would in his mercy ſupport the dying man? Was there ever a ſinner ſo hardened, that when he finds himſelf leaving the world, and ſtanding on the brink of an unknown eternity, is not diſpoſed with earneſt and trembling voice to pray that God would forgive his errors, and receive in peace his departing ſpirit? In ſuch ſituations as theſe, man feels what he truly is, and ſpeaks the native unadulterated language of the heart.—Accordingly, throughout all ages and nations, the obligation to prayer as a duty has been recogniſed, and its propriety has been felt. Over all the world, even among the moſt ſavage tribes, temples have been built, worſhippers have aſſembled in crowds; and the wildeſt ſuperſtition has, by the various forms of homage which it adopted, borne teſtimony to this truth, that there is ſome God, to whom, as *the hearer of prayer, all fleſh ſhould come.*

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In order that prayer may produce its proper effect, there are certain qualifications neceſſarily belonging to it, which come next to be conſidered.

One of the firſt and chief of theſe is ſerioufneſs, or an attentive and ſolemn frame of mind, in oppoſition to thoughts that wander, and to words that drop forth unmeaning from the lips. One would think it unneceſſary to mention ſuch a qualification to be requiſite, when we are to be employed in ſo ſolemn an act as an immediate addreſs to our Maker. Yet there is ground to apprehend, that an admonition of this nature is neceſſary to be given to many profeſſed Chriſtians.—Men from their childhood have been ſo oft accuſtomed to repeat certain expreſſions, which they call, ſaying prayers, with little underſtanding, and leſs attention to what they ſay, that the habit of it is apt to be continued throughout life; as if the mere uttering of words, or preſenting themſelves, at ſet times, in a certain poſture before God, had ſome charm in it to attract the bleſſings of Heaven.—My brethren,

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thren, this is trifling with one of the most important exercises in which the human mind can be employed; it is turning devotion into childish folly.—Let us never forget that it is the heart which must pray. The heart may pray, when no words are uttered. But if the heart be not engaged in prayer, all the words we can utter are no better than rude offensive sounds in the ear of the Almighty. Collect then thy mind within itself, before thou preferrest a single petition; nay, before thou pronouncest the name of God in prayer. Be alone with him, and thine own soul; under the same impression as if thou wert just about to appear before the judgment-seat of that God, to whom thou prayest.

To seriousness, we must join affection in prayer; I mean that devotion of the heart which is inspired by gratitude and love, in distinction from forced prayer; or what is unwillingly preferred from servile fear, or mere regard to decency. We must come into the presence of God, as to a Father in heaven; not to a hard and oppressive

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preſſive maſter, to whom we are obliged to pay obeiſance to prevent him from deſtroying us.——Profound humility is perfectly conſiſtent with this affectionate ſpirit in prayer. No preſumptuous familiarity muſt enter into our addreſſes to God. We are enjoined to ſerve him *with reverence and godly fear*. Our devotion will be moſt fervent and affectionate, when we entertain the humbleſt thoughts of ourſelves, joined with the moſt exalted conceptions of that God to whom we pray. *Remember that God is in heaven, and thou art on earth; therefore let thy words be few.** SERM. XIX.

Faith is a qualification of prayer expreſsly required in Scripture. He that prayeth, ſays the Apoſtle James, *let him aſk in faith, nothing wavering* †.—By faith in prayer, two things are meant; firſt, a general perſuaſion that God is a Being of infinite goodneſs and mercy; to whom, therefore, the pray-

* Eccleſ. v. 2. † James, i. 6.

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ers of his creatures are not put up in vain. *He that cometh unto God muſt believe*, not only that he is, but that he *is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him**: without ſome belief of this kind, prayers were altogether ſuperfluous. For who would ſend up ſupplications to a God who was believed to be inacceſſible to his creatures, and to have no regard to their circumſtances and wants?—At the ſame time, much ground we have to be conſcious of our own unworthineſs, and to tremble at the remembrance of it, when we addreſs ourſelves to Heaven; and therefore, ſecondly, to pray in faith is, in the ſcripture ſenſe of it, to pray in the name of Chriſt; that is, in the faith that it is through his merits and mediation only we can find acceptance with God. We acknowledge our guilt; we diſclaim all truſt in our own righteouſneſs; and implore grace from God on account of what his Son has

* Heb. xi. 6.

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done and suffered for us. This is the clear and express doctrine of the New Testament. *We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. We have this new and living way which he hath consecrated for us within the veil. Having this High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of Faith* *. SERM. XIX.

HAVING thus pointed out the chief and most essential qualifications of prayer, it remains that I lay some considerations before you, to shew the importance and advantages of it.

IN the first place, prayer is one of the most powerful means of recalling our minds from the vanities of life to serious thoughts; to a proper sense of God, and our duty; and to all the high objects with which we are intimately connected as rational and immortal beings. Surrounded, as we are, with the objects and pleasures of the world; busied with its avocations, and

* Heb. x. 19—22.

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continually immerſed in its purſuits, man would become altogether the victim of ſenſe, and a prey to its temptations; if there were not ſome ſtated occaſions which brought him home to himſelf, and to the thoughts of another world. Prayer has a much more impreſſive effect for this purpoſe, than can be expected from ſimple meditation. An immediate and ſolemn addreſs to an omniſcient Being, in whoſe preſence we conſider ourſelves as then particularly ſiſted, tends to produce a higher degree of ſerious and awful recollection, than would ariſe from a mere ſoliloquy of the mind with itſelf. In prayer, the ſoul approaches to the borders of an inviſible world, and acts as a ſpirit holding intercourſe with the Father of Spirits. It drops for a time the remembrance of its earthly connections, to dwell among everlaſting objects.—Prayer, by this means, both compoſes and purifies the heart; it gives the ſoul its proper elevation towards God, and has a happy effect to counterwork the dangerous impreſſions made by the corruptions of the world around us.

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In the next place, Prayer is useful, not only as a corrective of our natural levity and forgetfulness of God, but as an actual exercise of the best affections of our nature, which are thereby confirmed and strengthened. As far as prayer is not a mere emission of empty words, but speaks, as it ought to do, the language of the heart, it is an assemblage of all the affections which constitute piety. It implies the highest sentiments of reverence and adoration, of love and gratitude to God, of trust in his mercy, and of faith in our blessed Redeemer, all animating the heart. Whatever nourishes such affections as these in the soul, gives strength and support at the same time to active virtue; and thereby prepares and assists us for every duty of life.—With respect to ourselves, the view which prayer gives, of our necessities and wants, of our sins and offences against God, and of the dangers which we have thereby incurred, produces becoming humility of mind. Prostrate before that Great Being whom we have so much offended, all the

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pride of man is laid in the duſt. He is impreſſed with a ſenſe of what he truly is, and taught how far removed from what he ought to be. By the prayers he puts up for being aſſiſted to repent of paſt follies, and to make improvements for the future in virtue, the deſire of virtue is cheriſhed, and the purſuit of it excited; and if this deſire after virtue which is expreſſed in prayer be genuine, it is a degree of goodneſs already in ſome meaſure begun within the heart. Prayer is, at the ſame time, an exerciſe of benevolence towards men, as well as of piety towards God; when, as was before obſerved, not merely as individuals, but as members of the great family of God, we come before our heavenly Father, and expreſs our affectionate wiſhes for all our brethren.—While prayer in this manner gives exertion to many of the higheſt parts of goodneſs, it is attended moreover with this great advantage, that it tends to fortify the worſhipper in the practice of all his duties. For it impreſſes him with a ſenſe of God as the great friend and protector

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protector of righteousness in the world; to whom, therefore, all righteous men may look up with confidence and hope; whose strength is more than sufficient for their weakness; whose gracious aid none that served him ever implored in vain. SERM. XIX.

In the last place, Prayer is important, not only as a means of high improvement in religion, but as an instrument of consolation and relief under the distresses of life. How many situations are found in the world, where men have no resource left to them but prayer to God? How forlorn would the persecuted and afflicted, the sad and the sorrowful be, if even this last sanctuary were shut against them; if they had no Protector in heaven to whom they could look up in the hours of anguish?—We all know what a relief it is to be able to unbosom our griefs to some friend whom we believe compassionate and kind, even tho' it be not in his power to give us any effectual aid. In our Heavenly Father we can look up not only to One in whom *compassions*

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paſſions flow, who *knows our frame, remembers we are duſt, and pities us as a father pitieth his children*; but to One whoſe arm is all-powerful, either to ſupport us under our diſtreſs, or, if to his wiſdom it ſeem meet, to relieve us altogether from it.—Hence, Prayer is ſo often the laſt retreat of the miſerable. Where men can give them no aid, *God is their preſent help.* To him they can pour forth thoſe ſecret griefs, which to men they ſometimes cannot diſcloſe. He hears thoſe groans of the labouring heart, which no words can utter; and circumſtances which would expoſe our requeſts to be deſpiſed by the world, prevent not our prayers from finding acceptance with God. It his character to *hear the cry of the poor, and to regard the prayer of the deſtitute:* He is the *helper of them who have no help of man.*—Hence, prayer may be termed the Temple of Tranquillity to the unhappy; where their minds are ſoothed, and their cares and ſorrows are, for a time, huſhed and forgotten. It may juſtly be ſaid, that there only, on this ſide of

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of the grave, *the wicked ceaſe from trou-* SERM. XIX.
bling, and the weary are at reſt. There, the priſoners reſt together; they hear no more the voice of the oppreſſor. The ſmall and the great are there; and the ſervant is free from his maſter *.

THE reaſonableneſs of prayer as a duty, and the advantages attending it, being ſuch as I have now endeavoured briefly to ſet forth, there is no wonder that ſo many repeated recommendations of it occur in the ſacred writings; and that we are enjoined to be *fervent in prayer*, to be *inſtant in prayer*; nay, to *pray without ceaſing* †.—By ſuch precepts I do not underſtand that we are bound to frequent repetitions of long and tedious prayers. Our Saviour, in his excellent diſcourſe on this ſubject ‡, has ſufficiently cautioned us againſt the hypocriſy of thoſe who *uſe vain repetitions, and think that they ſhall be heard for their much ſpeaking*. But beſides the ſtated times of both public

* Job, iii. 17—19. † 1 Theſſ. v. 17. ‡ Matth. vi.

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SERM. XIX. and private prayer which we ought devoutly to obſerve, there is a habit of devotion, in occaſional elevations of the ſoul towards God, which highly deſerves to be cultivated. A thouſand occurrences which happen when we are engaged in the affairs of the world, and a thouſand objects which preſent themſelves to our view in the earth and the heavens when we are ſolitary and alone, may ſuggeſt matter of devout ejaculation towards God. By cheriſhing ſuch a habit, we preſerve on our minds the native ſpirit of prayer. We correct thoſe evil diſpoſitions which intercourſe with the world is always apt to introduce; we improve our contemplation of the objects which ſurround us, into an act of devotion; and either from the crowded city, or the ſolitary field, can ſend up to Heaven that homage of the heart, which is no leſs acceptable to the Almighty, than if it aroſe in vocal form from the midſt of the temple. In this ſenſe I underſtand the injunction given to *pray without ceaſing*. And ſurely, my brethren, when

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when we consider the high value of those blessings for which we depend on Heaven, it must appear to every reflecting mind, that we cannot be too earnest in our supplications to obtain them. To what purpose tend all our present solicitude and care; all the application of the thoughtful, and all the industry of the active and diligent? Is it not in order to pass through life, contented, easy, and happy? But can you pass through life with contentment and happiness, unless you enjoy peace within, a good conscience, and a comfortable hope of a future existence? Are not all these things directly and immediately the gifts of God, imparted by him to the souls of men? And can you expect to receive such gifts, unless you confess your dependance on Him who bestows them, and implore them from that gracious God, who *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not?* SERM. XIX.

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SERMON XX.

On the Laſt Judgment.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 10.

For we muſt all appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

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THESE words preſent to our view the great event which is to determine the fate of all mankind. No article of Chriſtian faith is more clearly aſcertained in Scripture, is of greater importance in itſelf, and more worthy to dwell upon our minds than this, of the final judgment of God. It adds ſolemnity

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solemnity to every part of religion;—it introduces an awful seriousness into our thoughts, by placing in the most striking light, the close connexion between our present behaviour and our everlasting happiness or misery. In the Gospel, it is described with so many circumstances of awe and terror, as may, to many, render the consideration of this subject dark and disagreeable. But we must remember, that though religion be often employed to soothe and comfort the distressed, and though this be one of its most salutary effects, yet this is not the only purpose to which it is to be applied by ministers of the Gospel. In the midst of that levity and dissipation with which the world abounds, it is necessary to awaken the giddy and unthinking, by setting before them, in full view, all the dangers they incur by their conduct.—*Knowing the terror of the Lord*, adds the Apostle in the verse immediately following the text, *we persuade men.*—In treating of this subject, I shall, in the first place, state the arguments which

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which reaſon affords for the belief of a judgment to come; and ſhall next ſhow the improvements which we ought to make of the particular diſcoveries the Goſpel had made to us concerning it.

I. By taking a view of the arguments which reaſon affords for the belief of a general judgment, our faith in the diſcoveries of the Goſpel will receive confirmation, from diſcerning their conſonance with the natural ſentiments of the human heart.

In the firſt place, and as the foundation of all, I begin with obſerving, that there is in the nature of things a real and eternal difference between right and wrong, between a virtuous and an immoral conduct; a difference which all men diſcern of themſelves, and which leads them unavoidably to think of ſome actions as deſerving blame and puniſhment, and of others as worthy of praiſe and reward. If all actions were conceived as indifferent in their nature, no idea of juſtice and retribution

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retribution would be found among men; they would not consider themselves as in any view accountable for their actions to any superior. But this is far from being the case. Every man feels himself under a law; the law of his being, which he cannot violate without being self-condemned. The most ignorant heathen knows and feels, that when he has committed an unjust or cruel action, he has committed a crime, and deserves punishment. Never was there a nation on the face of the earth, among whom there did not prevail a consciousness that, by inhumanity and fraud, they justly exposed themselves to the hatred of those around them, and to the displeasure of any secret invisible power that ruled the world.—This, therefore, may be assumed as an incontrovertible principle, that the difference of good and evil in actions, is not founded on arbitrary opinions or institutions, but in the nature of things, and the nature of man; and accords with the universal sense of the human kind. This being the case, it is certainly reasonable,

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In the ſecond place, to think that the Ruler of the world will make ſome diſtinction among his creatures according to their actions; and if this diſtinction be not made, or only imperfectly made in this life, there will be ſome future ſtate of exiſtence in which he will openly reward and puniſh.—To ſuppoſe God to be a mere indifferent ſpectator of the conduct of his creatures, regarding with an equal eye the evil and the good, is in effect to annihilate his exiſtence; as it contradicts every notion which mankind have entertained of a Supreme Being as juſt and good. It would repreſent him as inferior in character to many of his creatures on earth; as there is no man of tolerable virtue and humanity who is not ſhocked at the commiſſion of atrocious crimes, and who does not deſire to ſee the guilty puniſhed, the innocent protected, and the virtuous rewarded. If there exiſt at all a God who governs the world, (and what nation has not acknowledged him to exiſt?) as a governor he undoubtedly will act; and as ſuch, will, ſomewhere,

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and at ſome period or other, reward and puniſh, according as his creatures obey, or violate, that law, which he originally implanted in their hearts.—Whether this be completely done in the preſent world, is not a point that requires long diſcuſſion. The experience of all ages has ſhewn, that pain and pleaſure, proſperity and adverſity, are not at preſent diſtributed by Providence exactly according to the meaſure of men's probity and worth, but are apparently ſcattered with a promiſcuous hand. Hence the antient complaint, that *all things come alike to all men*; *that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked*; *that* to poverty and diſappointment the righteous are often left, while *the tabernacles of robbers proſper*.——An inference from hence might at firſt view ariſe not favourable to the doctrine we now ſupport; but we have to obſerve, SERM. XX.

In the third place, that although full retribution be not as yet made to the good and to the evil, yet plain marks appear of a government already

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begun and carried on by God in the univerſe, though not fully completed; marks of his favouring and taking part with virtue, and of his providing puniſhments for vice. This obſervation deſerves to be particularly attended to, as it is one of the chief arguments for a future judgment.—In the preſent ſyſtem of things, had the righteous been uniformly happy, and the wicked at all times miſerable, future judgment might have appeared unneceſſary, as juſtice had already taken place. On the other hand, had no diſtinction whatever taken place in the preſent ſyſtem between the righteous and the wicked as to happineſs and miſery, there might have been ground to ſuſpect that, ſince univerſal diſorder at preſent prevailed, diſorder would ever continue, and never be rectified by any future judgment. But neither of theſe ſuppoſitions is founded in fact. The preſent ſtate of the moral world is neither a ſtate of complete juſtice and order, nor of abſolute diſorder, but a ſtate of order and juſtice begun and carried

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carried to a certain length, though left as yet imperfect.——Obſerve, my brethren, that in the whole ſtructure and conſtitution of things, God hath ſhown himſelf to be favourable to virtue, and inimical to vice and guilt. He hath made a fixed proviſion for happineſs to virtue, by the powerful recommendation which it carries to univerſal eſteem and love; by the manifold benefits which it procures to ſociety; by the health, peace, and comfort of mind which it brings to the virtuous man. At the ſame time, from the crimes of the wicked, a multitude of miſeries is made infallibly to ſpring; loſs of character and eſteem, and of confidence and regard in ſociety; health always impaired by vice; and all comfortable enjoyment of life diſturbed by an uneaſy companion, which the ſinner carries about with him in his own conſcience, upbraiding him for his crimes, and threatening him with the diſpleaſure of the Almighty. SERM. XX.

Theſe are not things of caſual or accidental occurrence, but of univerſal

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experience, taking their riſe from the conſtitution of our nature, and from the fixed laws which regulate human events. They ſhew us what the direct tendency of virtue and vice is appointed by Providence to be; and if this tendency be not, in every inſtance, carried into effect, owing to circumſtances which belong to our preſent ſtate of probation and diſcipline, yet ſuch an eſtabliſhed natural tendency carries a ſufficient intimation of the will and pleaſure of our Creator. We ſee his *throne already ſet for judgment.* By his beginning in this world both to reward and to puniſh, we clearly behold him acting as a governor and a judge, and are led to prognoſticate what courſe he will hereafter hold.—By the conſtitution of things which he has fixed here, he has as plainly ſignified that he favours the virtuous and is diſpleaſed with the wicked, as if he had declared it to us by a voice from the clouds. Altho' the preſent ſtate of mankind requires that the juſt ſhould ſometimes ſuffer, and the ſinner be allowed to proſper, the ſtrongeſt preſumption

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ſumption ſtill remains that there is a period to come, when God will complete his righteous government by making the one fully bleſt, and rendering the other as miſerable as they deſerve to be; eſpecially as we can obſerve, SERM. XIX.

In the fourth place, that a ſatisfactory account may be given why judgment is at preſent poſtponed, and complete retribution not made, either to the good or the bad. We are to take notice, that even among men, the wiſdom and juſtice of government do not conſiſt in immediately rewarding and puniſhing on every occaſion, but in exerciſing thoſe acts of government publickly, at ſuch times and with ſuch circumſtances as may have the moſt powerful effect for the benefit of ſociety. A ſimilar conſideration perfectly accounts for the full execution of juſtice being delayed by God in this world: for rewards and puniſhments being only begun here, but left unfiniſhed. Were they completed in this world to their full extent, all the purpoſes of a ſtate

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a ſtate of trial and diſcipline would be defeated. No room would be left for exerciſe and improvement to the good in many virtues, if they were never to undergo any trials; if they felt full reward immediately conferred on every righteous action they performed, and ſaw the wicked inſtantly cut off, as ſoon as a crime was committed. For ſalutary diſcipline, therefore, to the good, in order to improve their virtues; and from patience to the bad, in order to give them room for repentance, it was fit and wiſe that final judgment ſhould at preſent be poſtponed. Divine juſtice ſtands for a while, as behind the veil, and leaves men at full ſcope to act according to their different diſpoſitions, that their real characters may be fully diſplayed; the fidelity of the upright be tried and proved, and the obſtinately wicked left without excuſe. The delay of judgment, therefore, and the ſeeming inequality that now takes place in the ways of Providence, is ſo far from forming any ground of ſuſpicion that judgment will never come, that, on the contrary, it is an argument

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ment of the wiſdom of the divine go- SERM. XX.
vernment, and neceſſarily enters into the plans it is now carrying forward.

Such are the preſumptions which reaſon furniſhes, for rendering it more than probable that, at the concluſion of human things, God will *render to every one according to his works*. They may ſerve to ſtrengthen our faith; but on mere reaſonings our faith reſts not. God in his mercy has given us ſurer light in an article of ſo great importance. To the conſideration, therefore, of the diſcoveries which the goſpel of Chriſt hath made to us, we now proceed.

II. You all know how often we are aſſured in the New Teſtament, that God hath *appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs*; a day and an hour which no man knoweth, but which is fixed in the counſels of Heaven. In the ſacred writings a very particular account is given us of the whole procedure of that ſolemn day, accompanied with an aſſemblage of circumſtances of the moſt awful and terrifick nature. The ſcene is ſuch as forbids

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forbids all attempts to heighten, or even to do it juſtice by human deſcription. Beneath ſuch a ſubject all imagination ſinks. The efforts of the declaimer or the poet are here alike in vain. We are informed that the laſt day ſhall be uſhered in by *ſigns in the ſun, and ſigns in the moon and ſtars; upon the earth, diſtreſs of nations with perplexity; the ſea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of Heaven ſhall be ſhaken. The ſound of a trumpet ſhall be heard, at which the dead ſhall riſe out of their graves. The ſign of the Son of Man ſhall appear. He ſhall come in a cloud with power and great glory, and all the Holy Angels with him. A great white throne ſhall be ſet, and He ſhall ſit thereon in his glory. Before Him ſhall be gathered all nations. Books ſhall be opened, and the dead ſhall be judged out of the things which are found written in the books. He ſhall ſeparate the righteous from the wicked as a ſhepherd divideth the ſheep from the goats; and he ſhall ſet*

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*the righteous on his right hand, and the wicked on his left! Then ſhall he ſay to them on his right hand, Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. To them on his left hand he ſhall ſay, Depart from me, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels; and theſe ſhall go into everlaſting puniſhment, but the righteous into life eternal**.—Whether every one of the circumſtances here ſet forth is to be underſtood in a ſtrictly literal ſenſe, or with ſome meaſure of myſtical and allegorical interpretation, it is not eaſy to determine, nor is it eſſential for us to know. Regard muſt be had to the figurative ſtyle frequently employed by the ſacred writers, of which we find ſo many examples in the prophetical writings and the Book of Revelations, wherein thoſe ſpiritual divine things which are above our conception, are ſet forth under ſuch repreſentations of ſenſible objects and appearances as are moſt calculated to

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* Luke, xxi. 25. Daniel, vii. 9. Matth. xxv. 31.

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ſtrike and impreſs our minds. The circumſtance, for inſtance, of books being opened before the Judge, as containing a regiſter of every man's actions, and of the dead being judged from what had been written in thoſe books, is plainly a metaphorical alluſion to what is practiſed among men; deſigned merely to convey the ſtrongeſt impreſſion of God's ſtrict and accurate obſervation of the minuteſt particulars of men's behaviour on earth. It is ſufficient for us to be ſatisfied, that whatever tremendous grandeur may attend the judgment of the laſt day, it will be conducted in ſuch a manner as ſhall be perfectly ſuitable to the perfections of the Almighty.—Reſting on ſuch facts as are plainly and explicitly revealed on this ſubject, let us conſider,

In the firſt place, the Perſon who is to act as Judge, even the eternal Son of God. We muſt all, ſays the text, *appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt.* This is repeated in many paſſages of the New Teſtament. The day of judgment

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judgment is termed *the day of the Son of Man.* *The Father*, we are told, *judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son**. This conſtitution of Providence is, in many reſpects, wiſe, fit, and gracious. It was highly proper that HE who once, in the cauſe of God and mankind, ſtood as a criminal before impious judges on earth, ſhould be thus ſignally vindicated and honoured, by appearing in the illuſtrious character of the Judge of all the earth. It was fit that the character of Judge and Sovereign ſhould be made known, as added to the other characters he bore, of Prieſt and Prophet, in order to give weight and authority to all his precepts, from the awful conſideration that on our obedience to him depends our everlaſting fate. But the moſt ſtriking and important circumſtance in this appointment of Providence is, the aſſurance which it affords us of the perfect equity of this final judgment. For here we behold a Judge SERM. XX.

* John, v. 22.

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who is taken, as we may ſay, from among ourſelves. He dwelt among us on earth, and did not diſdain to call us brethren. He knows experimentally what human paſſions and human frailties are; and what the Apoſtle to the Hebrews ſays of him as a Prieſt, may be as fully applied to him as a Judge. *We have not a Judge who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but One who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without ſin.* The infinite majeſty of the Supreme Being is an object at all times overwhelming to the mind. In the ſituation of a Judge particularly, it might fill us with diſmay. But in the perſon of our bleſſed Redeemer, that majeſty is placed in a milder light. The attribute of mercy comes forward in ſo conſpicuous a manner, as to allay the dread we would otherwiſe entertain. To the obſtinate and hardened ſinner, the judgment of our Saviour may indeed juſtly occaſion terror. Well may they be afraid of appearing before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, who have ſcorned and deſpiſed

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piſed him and his religion. But to the pious and the humble, no conſideration can carry more comfort than that they are to appear in judgment before him who ſo loved the human race as to die for them; and from whom, therefore, may be expected every favourable allowance which their caſe will admit. —From the contemplation of the Judge, let us

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In the ſecond place, turn our thoughts towards the perſons who are to be judged. Theſe, we are again and again informed, ſhall be all mankind; both the quick and the dead; thoſe who ſhall then be found upon the earth; and all the paſt generations who have finiſhed their courſe, and been long ago gathered unto their fathers, *We muſt all*, ſays the text, *appear before the judgment-ſeat of Chriſt.*—No privilege ſhall exempt the great, no obſcurity ſhelter the low from the judgment of God. All the frivolous diſtinctions which faſhion and vanity had introduced among men, ſhall at that day be annihilated. No longer ſhall we then appear

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appear under the perſonated characters of high and low, of rich and poor.—Under the ſimple character of men and ſubjects of God, we ſhall be brought forth to be judged according to our works. In the one great diſtinction of good and bad, of righteous or wicked, all other diſtinctions ſhall then be eternally loſt.—Let the foreſight of this humble the pride of the oſtentatious and the great. Thou who now carrieſt thy head ſo high, ſhalt, upon the ſame footing with thy loweſt dependant, ſtand before the tribunal of the Almighty. Thou who now oppreſſeſt thy weak brother with impunity, ſhalt then tremble for thine own ſafety as much, perhaps more than he. For *there is no reſpect of perſons with God.* The laſt day is juſtly ſtyled the *day of the revelation of the ſecrets of all hearts.* Stript of all diſguiſe, the character of every man ſhall be unveiled to public view. Then ſhall the falſe friend be detected, the concealed ſlanderer be expoſed, the ſecret adulterer, the treacherous enemy, the hypocritical pretender, be all brought to light.

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What a check ſhould the thoughts of this diſcovery give to the arts of diſſimulation and falſehood? What avails it thee, O wiſe man of the world! to paſs for a ſhort time with fair colours before the eye of men, if by the eye of God thou art already diſcovered, and ſhalt, at laſt, be diſcovered to the view of all mankind? If now thou art ſo ſolicitous to conceal thy real character from the world, and canſt not bear that the deſigns and intrigues which have paſſed through thy mind in the courſe of but one day ſhould be all made known, doſt thou not tremble at the thought of the whole machinations of thy life being brought forth and proclaimed before aſſembled men and angels?—At this great day too, when ſecret vice is made known in order to be puniſhed, ſecret virtue ſhall be diſcloſed and rewarded. The humble good man, who paſſed unnoticed thro' the obſcurity of private life; whoſe days, if not marked by any ſplendid deeds, were ennobled by virtuous actions, ſhall then be ſingled out from the crowd, and brought forward as the friend

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SERM. XX. friend of God and Heaven.—The anguish of the wicked, upon the discovery and comparison of the life of such a person with their own, is thus beautifully described by one of the Apocryphal writers; *This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. Now he is numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints. But we wearied ourselves in the way of destruction. What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasted by. But the righteous live for evermore. Their reward also is with the Lord; and the care of them with the Most High* *.——From this view of the persons who are to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, let us

In the 3d place, go on to the consideration of the things for which they are to be judged. These, we are told in the text, are all *the things done in the body,*

* Wisdom of Solomon, v. 3—15.

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whether they be good or bad. This is the constant tenor of Scripture, that men are to be judged *according to their actions.* It is not said that men are to be finally judged according to their principles or belief, but *according to their works.* This does not lead to any conclusion that principles or belief are not essential in forming a character. Without good principles it cannot be expected there can be any regular tenor of good actions. But actions are the test of principles. Whatever we may pretend as to our belief, it is the strain of our actions that must show whether our principles have been good or bad; and supposing them ever so good, whether we have allowed them to exert a proper influence on our conduct. The constant doctrine of the Gospel is, *by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father shall enter into the kingdom of heaven* *. Of all the actions we have done, it is

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* Matth. vii. 21.

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repreſented that, in the day of judgment ſtrict examination ſhall be taken. Not our public conduct only, and what we reckon the momentous parts of our life, but the indulgence of our private pleaſures, the amuſements of our ſecret thoughts, and idle hours, ſhall be brought into account. According to that emblematical repreſentation given in the Goſpel, which I before mentioned as an expreſſive figure, there is an inviſible pen always writing over our heads, and making an exact regiſter of all the tranſactions of our life.—How careful and circumſpect ought this to render us over every part of our behaviour? if any of our actions were of a tranſient and fugitive nature; if they were to die with us, and to be forgotten as ſoon as we are gone, there might be ſome excuſe for a looſe and inconſiderate conduct. But we know the caſe to be widely different; and that what we are doing now, we do for eternity. None of our actions periſh and are forgotten. They will all accompany us to the tribunal of God.

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God. They will there teſtify, either for, or againſt us; and however much we might wiſh to diſclaim ſome of them, they may be conſidered as lifting up their voices and ſaying, "We are "thine, for thou haſt done us; we are "thy works and we will follow thee!" SERM. XX.

It will now be ſaid, if ſo ſevere a ſcrutiny muſt be undergone for all we have done and thought, who ſhall be able to ſtand before God in judgment? How far from innocence ſhall the beſt of us be found at that day?—The thought is undoubtedly alarming. But let us not deſpond; we are aſſured, there *is forgiveneſs with God, that he may be feared. He is not extreme to mark iniquity; for he knows our frame and remembers we are duſt.* Powerful is the atonement of our bleſſed Redeemer to procure pardon for the greateſt ſinner who has been penitent. We have all reaſon to believe, that amidſt numberleſs infirmities which attend humanity, what the great Judge will chiefly regard, is the habitual prevailing turn of our heart and life; how far we have been

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SERM. XX. actuated by a ſincere deſire to do our duty. This we know for certain, that all the meaſures of this judgment ſhall be conducted with moſt perfect equity. God will not exact from any man what he had never given him. He will judge him according to the degree of light that was afforded him, according to the means of knowledge and improvement that were put into his hands.—Hence, many a virtuous heathen ſhall be preferred before many mere profeſſors of Chriſtian faith. *They ſhall come from the eaſt and the weſt, the north and the ſouth, and ſit down in the kingdom of God; when the children of the kingdom are caſt out* *. For, as the Apoſtle to the Romans hath taught us, *they who ſinned without the law*, that is, without knowledge of the written law, *ſhall periſh*, ſhall be judged, *without the law; for when the Gentiles which have not the law, do, by nature, the things contained in the law, theſe having not the law,*

* Luke, xiii. 29. Matth. viii. 11.

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SERM. XX.

are a law unto themſelves *.—In the account given by our Lord of the procedure of the laſt judgment, in the 25th chapter of the Goſpel of Matthew, particular ſtreſs is laid upon works of beneficence and mercy; on the hungry being fed, the naked being cloathed, and the ſick being viſited by the righteous. But though, in that parable, no virtues of any other kind are particularized, we are certainly not to infer any excluſion of other parts of duty; of piety, juſtice, temperance, and purity; as requiſite to the character of the man, who, at the laſt day, will be accepted by God. The ſcope of the parable was to impreſs that covetous and ſelfiſh nation of the Jews, to whom the parable was addreſſed, with a deep ſenſe of the importance of thoſe virtues in which they were remarkably deficient, and which are, in themſelves ſo eſſential, compaſſion and humanity to their brethren.—It now only remains.

* Rom. ii. 12. 14.

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SERM. XX.

In the laſt place to fix our attention on that final definitive ſentence which is to cloſe the whole procedure of the laſt day, and to terminate for ever the hopes and fears of the human race.— The righteous are by the Great Judge called to eternal life and happineſs; and the wicked appointed to go into everlaſting puniſhment. Into thoſe future habitations of the good and the bad, it is not ours to penetrate. All that we know is, that after the Judge hath pronounced the righteous to be the *bleſſed of his Father*, they ſhall be *caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and ſo they ſhall be ever with the Lord**; received into manſions where all the inhabitants ſhall be bleſt; but where we are taught there ſhall be different degrees of exaltation and felicity, according to the advancement which men had made in holineſs and virtue; *one glory of the ſun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the ſtars, and one ſtar differing from another in glory* †.—

* 1 Theſſ. iv. 17. † 1 Corinth. xv. 41.

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SERM. XX.

On the miſery prepared for the reprobate, it would be ſhocking to dwell; and in a high degree improper and preſumptuous in us to deſcant on the degree and duration of thoſe puniſhments which infinite juſtice and wiſdom may ſee cauſe to inflict on the incurably wicked.——The whole great ſcheme of Providence being now completed, and its ways fully juſtified to all rational beings, well may univerſal acclamations of praiſe ariſe from all the heavenly hoſts; *Hallelujah to him that ſitteth on the throne, and to the lamb of God, for ever and ever! Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty; juſt and true are all thy ways, thou King of Saints!* This earth which had been ſo long the theatre of human actions and human glory, having now accompliſhed the purpoſe for which, as a temporary ſtructure, it was erected, ſhall, at this conſummation of things, finally diſappear from the univerſe. *The heavens ſhall paſs away with a great noiſe; the*

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SERM. XX.

elements shall pass away with a fervent heat; the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up; and its place shall know it no more!*

LET *us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man*; the whole of his duty, his interest, and his happiness. It is the road to a comfortable life, to a peaceful death, to a happy eternity. *For God*, addeth the wise man, *shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*—Let the prospect of this judgment so dwell on our minds as to produce that degree of seriousness which, in this vain and changing world, becomes us as Christians, becomes us as men. If it be our care to preserve a good conscience, and to do the things that are right, that judgment will not be to us an object of dismay. On the contrary, amidst the

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

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many diſcouragements which our vir- SERM. XX.
tuous endeavours meet with at preſent, it will be a comfort to think that *verily there is a juſt God to judge the earth*, who ſhall in the end *make all crooked things ſtraight*, and fully recompenſe his ſervants for the hardſhips they may now ſuffer by perſevering in the path of integrity.—This is the ſeaſon, not of reaping, but of ſowing; not of reſt and enjoyment, but of labour and combat. You are now running the race; hereafter you ſhall receive the prize. You are now approving your fidelity, in the midſt of trials; at the laſt day you ſhall receive the crown of the faithful. *Be patient, therefore, ſtabliſh your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. The Judge is at hand; and his reward is with him.*

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A

SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER

OF

DR. HUGH BLAIR.

DR. HUGH BLAIR was born in Edinburgh, on the 7th day of April, 1718.—His father, John Blair, a reſpectable merchant in that city, was a deſcendant of the ancient family of Blair, in Ayrſhire, and grandſon of the famous Mr. Robert Blair, Miniſter of St. Andrew's, Chaplain to Charles I. and one of the moſt zealous and diſtinguiſhed clergymen of the period in which he lived. This worthy man, though firmly attached to the cauſe of freedom, and to the Preſbyterian form of church government, and though actively engaged in

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in all the measures adopted for their support; yet, by his steady, temperate conduct, commanded the respect even of his opponents. In preference to all the other ecclesiastical leaders of the covenanting party, he was selected by the King himself to fill an office which, from the circumstances of the time, gave frequent access to the Royal Person; "because," said his Majesty, "that man is pious, prudent, "learned, and of a meek and moderate "calm temper."—His talents seem to have descended as an inheritance to his posterity. For, of the two sons who survived him, David, the eldest, was a clergyman of eminence in Edinburgh, father to Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of Athelstonford, the celebrated author of the poem entitled THE GRAVE; and grandfather to his Majesty's Solicitor General for Scotland, whose masculine eloquence and profound knowledge of law have, in the public estimation, placed him indisputably at the head of the Scottish bar. From his youngest son Hugh, who engaged in business as a merchant, and had the honour to fill a high station in the magistracy of Edinburgh, sprung the learned clergyman, who is the subject of this narrative.

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THE views of Dr. Blair, from his earliest youth, were turned towards the Church, and his education received a suitable direction. After the usual grammatical course at school, he entered the Humanity Class in the University of Edinburgh, in October 1730, and spent eleven years at that celebrated seminary, assiduously employed in the literary and scientific studies prescribed by the Church of Scotland to all who are to become candidates for her licence to preach the Gospel. During this important period, he was distinguished among his companions both for diligence and proficiency; and obtained from the Professors under whom he studied, repeated testimonies of approbation. One of them deserves to be mentioned particularly, because in his own opinion, it determined the bent of his genius towards polite literature. An essay, περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ, or, ON THE BEAUTIFUL, written by him when a student of logic in the usual course of academical exercises, had the good fortune to attract the notice of Professor Stevenson, and, with circumstances honourable to the author, was appointed to be read in public at the conclusion of the Session. This mark of distinction made a deep

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deep impreſſion on his mind; and the eſſay which merited it, he ever after recollected with partial affection, and preſerved to the day of his death as the firſt earneſt of his fame.

At this time Dr. Blair commenced a method of ſtudy which contributed much to the accuracy and extent of his knowledge, and which he continued to practiſe occaſionally even after his reputation was fully eſtabliſhed. It conſiſted in making abſtracts of the moſt important works which he read, and in digeſting them according to the train of his own thoughts. Hiſtory, in particular, he reſolved to ſtudy in this manner; and, in concert with ſome of his youthful aſſociates, he conſtructed a very comprehenſive ſcheme of chronological tables, for receiving into its proper place every important fact that ſhould occur. The ſcheme deviſed by this young ſtudent for his own private uſe was afterwards improved, filled up, and given to the Public by his learned friend Dr. John Blair, Prebendary of Weſtminſter, in his valuable work, "The Chronology and Hiſ-" tory of the World."

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In the year 1739, Dr. Blair took his degree of A. M. On that occaſion he printed and defended a theſis *De Fundamentis et Obligatione Legis Naturæ*, which contains a ſhort, but maſterly diſcuſſion of this important ſubject, and exhibits in elegant Latin an outline of the moral principles, which have been ſince more fully unfolded and illuſtrated in his Sermons.

The Univerſity of Edinburgh, about this period, numbered among her pupils many young men who were ſoon to make a diſtinguiſhed figure in the civil, the eccleſiaſtical, and the literary hiſtory of their country. With moſt of them Dr. Blair entered into habits of intimate connection, which no future competition or jealouſy occurred to interrupt, which held them united through life in their views of public good, and which had the moſt beneficial influence on their own improvement, on the progreſs of elegance and taſte among their cotemporaries, and on the general intereſts of the community to which they belonged.

On the completion of his academical courſe, he underwent the cuſtomary trials before

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before the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and received from that venerable body a license to preach the Gospel, on the 21st of October 1741. His public life now commenced with very favourable prospects. The reputation which he brought from the University was fully justified by his first appearances in the pulpit; and, in a few months, the fame of his eloquence procured for him a presentation to the parish of Coleffie in Fife, where he was ordained to the office of the holy ministry, on the 23d of September 1742. But he was not permitted to remain long in this rural retreat. A vacancy in the second charge of the Canongate of Edinburgh furnished to his friends an opportunity of recalling him to a station more suited to his talents. And, though one of the most popular and eloquent clergymen in the Church was placed in competition with him, a great majority of the electors decided in favour of this young orator, and restored him in July 1743 to the bounds of his native city.

In this station Dr. Blair continued eleven years, discharging with great fidelity and success the various duties of the pastoral

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paſtoral office. His diſcourſes from the pulpit in particular attracted univerſal admiration. They were compoſed with uncommon care; and, occupying a middle place between the dry metaphyſical diſcuſſion of one claſs of preachers, and the looſe incoherent declamation of another, they blended together, in the happieſt manner, the light of argument with the warmth of exhortation, and exhibited captivating ſpecimens of what had hitherto been rarely heard in Scotland, the poliſhed, well-compacted, and regular didactic oration.

In conſequence of a call from the Town-Council and General-Seſſion of Edinburgh, he was tranſlated from the Canongate to Lady Yeſter's, one of the city churches, on the 11th of October 1754: and on the 15th day of day of June 1758, he was promoted to the High Church of Edinburgh, the moſt important eccleſiaſtical charge in the kingdom. To this charge he was raiſed at the requeſt of the Lords of Council and Seſſion, and of the other diſtinguiſhed official characters who have their ſeats in that church. And the uniform prudence, ability and ſucceſs

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which, for a period of more than forty years, accompanied all his miniſterial labours in that conſpicuous and difficult ſtation, ſufficiently evince the wiſdom of their choice.

HITHERTO his attention ſeems to have been devoted almoſt excluſively to the attainment of profeſſional excellence; and to the regular diſcharge of his parochial duties. No production of his pen had yet been given to the world by himſelf, except two ſermons preached on particular occaſions, ſome tranſlations, in verſe, of paſſages of Scripture for the Pſalmody of the Church, and a few articles in the Edinburgh Review; a publication begun in 1755, and conducted for a ſhort time by ſome of the ableſt men in the kingdom. But ſtanding as he now did at the head of his profeſſion, and releaſed by the labour of former years from the drudgery of weekly preparation for the pulpit, he began to think ſeriouſly on a plan for teaching to others that art which had contributed ſo much to the eſtabliſhment of his own fame. With this view, he communicated to his friends a ſcheme of Lectures on Compoſition; and, having obtained the approbation

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approbation of the Univerſity, he began to read them in the College on the 11th of December 1759. To this undertaking he brought all the qualifications requiſite for executing it well; and along with them a weight of reputation, which could not fail to give effect to the leſſons he ſhould deliver. For, beſides the teſtimony given to his talents by his ſucceſſive promotions in the Church, the Univerſity of St. Andrew's, moved chiefly by the merit of his eloquence, had in June 1757 conferred on him the degree of D. D. a literary honour which, at that time, was very rare in Scotland. Accordingly his firſt Courſe of Lectures was well attended, and received with great applauſe. The patrons of the Univerſity, convinced that they would form a valuable addition to the ſyſtem of education, agreed in the following ſummer to inſtitute a rhetorical claſs, under his direction, as a permament part of their academical eſtabliſhment: and, on the 7th of April 1762, his Majeſty was graciouſly pleaſed "To erect and endow a Profeſſor-"ſhip of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in "the Univerſity of Edinburgh, and to "appoint Dr. Blair, in conſideration of

" his approved qualifications, Regius Pro-
" feſſor thereof, with a ſalary of £. 70."
Theſe Lectures he publiſhed in 1783, when he retired from the labours of the office; and the general voice of the Public has pronounced them to be a moſt judicious, elegant, and comprehenſive ſyſtem of rules for forming the ſtyle and cultivating the taſte of youth.

About the time in which he was occupied in laying the foundations of this uſeful inſtitution, he had an opportunity of conferring another important obligation on the literary world, by the part which he acted in reſcuing from oblivion the poems of Oſſian. It was by the ſolicitation of Dr. Blair and Mr. John Home that Mr. Macpherſon was induced to publiſh his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*; and their patronage was of eſſential ſervice in procuring the ſubſcription which enabled him to undertake his tour through the Highlands for collecting the materials of Fingal, and of thoſe other delightful productions which bear the name of Oſſian. To theſe productions Dr. Blair applied the teſt of genuine criticiſm, and ſoon after their publication

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rits in *a Diſſertation*, which, for beauty of language, delicacy of taſte, and acuteneſs of critical inveſtigation, has few parallels. It was printed in 1763, and ſpread the reputation of its author throughout Europe.

THE great objects of his literary ambition being now attained, his talents were for many years conſecrated ſolely to the important and peculiar employments of his ſtation. It was not till the year 1777 that he could be induced to favour the world with a volume of the Sermons which had ſo long furniſhed inſtruction and delight to his own congregation. But this volume being well received, the public approbation encouraged him to proceed: three other volumes followed at different intervals; and all of them experienced a degree of ſucceſs of which few publications can boaſt. They circulated rapidly and widely wherever the Engliſh tongue extends; they were ſoon tranſlated into almoſt all the languages of Europe; and his preſent Majeſty, with that wiſe attention to the intereſts of religion and literature which diſtinguiſhes his reign, was graciouſly pleaſed to adjudge them worthy

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of a public reward. By a royal mandate to the Exchequer in Scotland, dated July 25th, 1780, a penſion of £. 200 a-year was conferred on their author, which continued unaltered till his death.

THE motives which gave riſe to the preſent volume are ſufficiently explained by himſelf in his Addreſs to the Reader. The Sermons which it contains were compoſed at very different periods of his life; but they were all written out anew in his own hand, and in many parts re-compoſed, during the courſe of laſt ſummer, after he had completed his eighty-ſecond year. They were delivered to the publiſhers about ſix weeks before his death, in the form and order in which they now appear. And it may gratify his readers to know, that the laſt of them which he compoſed, though not the laſt in the order adopted for publication, was the Sermon on *a Life of Diſſipation and Pleaſure*—a ſermon written with great dignity and eloquence, and which ſhould be regarded as his ſolemn parting to a claſs of men, whoſe conduct is highly important to the community, and whoſe

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laboured moſt zealouſly to promote.

THE Sermons which he has given to the world are univerſally admitted to be models in their kind; and they will long remain durable monuments of the piety, the genius, and ſound judgment of their author. But they formed only a ſmall part of the Diſcourſes he prepared for the pulpit. The remainder, modeſty led him to think unfit for the preſs; and, influenced by an excuſable ſolicitude for his reputation, he left behind him an explicit injunction that his numerous manuſcripts ſhould be deſtroyed. The greatneſs of their number was creditable to his profeſſional character, and exhibited a convincing proof that his fame as a public teacher had been honourably purchaſed, by the moſt unwearied application to the private and unſeen labours of his office. It reſted on the uniform intrinſic excellence of his Diſcourſes, in point of matter and compoſition, rather than on foreign attractions; for his delivery, though diſtinct, ſerious, and impreſſive, was not remarkably diſtinguiſhed by that magic charm of voice and action which captivates the ſenſes and imagination

gination, and which, in the eſtimation of ſuperficial hearers, conſtitutes the chief merit of a preacher.

In that department of his profeſſional duty which regarded the government of the church, Dr. Blair was ſteadily attached to the cauſe of moderation. From diffidence, and perhaps from a certain degree of inaptitude for extemporary ſpeaking, he took a leſs public part in the conteſts of eccleſiaſtical politics than ſome of his cotemporaries; and, from the ſame cauſes, he never would conſent to become Moderator of the General Aſſembly of the Church of Scotland. But his influence among his brethren was extenſive: his opinion, guided by that ſound uprightneſs of judgment, which formed the predominant feature of his intellectual character, had been always held in high reſpect by the friends with whom he acted; and, for many of the laſt years of his life, it was received by them almoſt as a law. The great leading principle in which they cordially concurred with him, and which directed all their meaſures, was to preſerve the church,

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church, on the one ſide, from a ſlaviſh, corrupting dependance on the civil power; and, on the other, from a greater infuſion of democratical influence than is compatible with good order, and the eſtabliſhed conſtitution of the country.

The reputation which he acquired in the diſcharge of his public duties, was well ſuſtained by the great reſpectability of his private character. Deriving from family aſſociations a ſtrong ſenſe of clerical decorum, feeling on his heart deep impreſſions of religious and moral obligation, and guided in his intercourſe with the world by the ſame correct and delicate taſte which appeared in his writings, he was eminently diſtinguiſhed through life, by the prudence, purity, and dignified propriety of his conduct. His mind, by conſtitution and culture, was admirably formed for enjoying happineſs. Well-balanced in itſelf by the nice proportion and adjuſtment of its faculties, it did not incline him to any of thoſe eccentricities, either of opinion or of action, which are too often the lot of genius:—free from all tincture

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tincture of envy, it delighted cordially in the proſperity and fame of his companions; ſenſible to the eſtimation in which he himſelf was held, it diſpoſed him to dwell at times on the thought of his ſucceſs with a ſatisfaction which he did not affect to conceal: inacceſſible alike to gloomy and to peeviſh impreſſions, it was always maſter of its own movements, and ready, in an uncommon degree, to take an active and pleaſing intereſt in every thing, whether important or trifling, that happened to become for the moment the object of his attention. This habit of mind, tempered with the moſt unſuſpecting ſimplicity, and united to eminent talents and inflexible integrity, while it ſecured to the laſt his own reliſh of life, was wonderfully calculated to endear him to his friends, and to render him an invaluable member of any ſociety to which he belonged. Accordingly there have been few men more univerſally reſpected by thoſe who knew him, more ſincerely eſteemed in the circle of his acquaintance, or more tenderly beloved by thoſe who enjoyed the bleſſing of his private and domeſtic connection.

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In April, 1748, he married his couſin Katharine Bannatine, daughter of the Rev. James Bannatine, one of the Miniſters of Edinburgh. By her he had a ſon who died in infancy, and a daughter, who lived to her twenty-firſt year, the pride of her parents, and adorned with all the accompliſhments that became her age and ſex. Mrs. Blair herſelf, a woman of great good ſenſe and ſpirit, was alſo taken from him a few years before his death, after ſhe had ſhared with the tendereſt affection in all his fortunes, and contributed near half a century to his happineſs and comfort.

Dr. BLAIR had been naturally of a feeble conſtitution of body; but as he grew up his conſtitution acquired greater firmneſs and vigour. Though liable to occaſional attacks from ſome of the ſharpeſt and moſt painful diſeaſes that afflict the human frame, he enjoyed a general ſtate of good health; and, through habitual cheerfulneſs, temperance, and care, ſurvived the uſual term of human life. For ſome years he had felt himſelf unequal to the fatigue of inſtructing his very large congregation from the pulpit; and, under the impreſ-

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ſion which this feeling produced, he has been heard at times to ſay with a ſigh, "that he was left almoſt the laſt of his co-"temporaries." Yet he continued to the end in the regular diſcharge of all his other official duties, and particularly in giving advice to the afflicted, who, from different quarters of the kingdom, ſolicited his correſpondence. His laſt ſummer was devoted to the preparation of this volume of Sermons; and, in the courſe of it, he exhibited a vigour of underſtanding, and capacity of exertion, equal to that of his beſt days. He began the winter pleaſed with himſelf on account of the completion of this work; and his friends were flattered with the hope that he might live to enjoy the acceſſion of emolument and fame which he expected it would bring.—But the ſeeds of a mortal diſeaſe were lurking unperceived within him. On the 24th of December 1800, he complained of a pain in his bowels, which, during that and the following day, gave him but little uneaſineſs; and he received as uſual the viſits of his friends. On the afternoon of the 26th, the ſymptoms became violent and alarming: he felt that he was approaching

the

the end of his appointed courſe: and retaining to the laſt moment the full poſſeſſion of his mental faculties, he expired on the morning of the 27th, with the compoſure and hope which become a Chriſtian paſtor.

THE lamentation for his death was univerſal and deep through the city which he had ſo long inſtructed and adorned. Its Magiſtrates, participating in the general grief, appointed his church to be put in mourning; and his colleague in it, the writer of this Narrative, who had often experienced the ineſtimable value of his counſel and friendſhip, delivered on the Sabbath after his funeral a diſcourſe to his congregation, with an extract from which this account ſhall be cloſed. It is inſerted here at the particular requeſt of that very reſpectable body of men who compoſed his Kirk Seſſion, and who, by their public approbation of this tribute to his memory, are deſirous of tranſmitting, with his Sermons, to poſterity a memorial of the veneration and eſteem with which his conduct had inſpired them.—After exhorting to contemplate and follow the patriarchs and

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and ſaints of former ages, *who, through faith and patience, inherit the promiſes*, the Preacher thus proceeded:

" In this competition for virtuous attainment it may be often uſeful to bring down your eye from contemplating the departed worthies of diſtant times and countries, towards patterns of imitation that are endeared to you by more tender ties. If, in the relations of life, you have had a connection,—if, in the circle of your own family, you have had a father, a huſband, or a brother, who diſcharged with exemplary fidelity the duties of his ſtation, whom every tongue bleſſed as the friend of God and man, and who died as he lived, full of faith and hope, place him before you as the model of your conduct,—conceive him bending from his ſeat in the ſkies, pleaſed with your attachment, deeply intereſted in your ſucceſs, and cheering you in your labours of love. His image will be as a guardian angel, to admoniſh you when dangers approach, to rouſe within you every principle of virtuous exertion, and to inſpire you with ſtrength to overcome.

" Our

"OUR hearts, Chriſtians, have been "deeply pierced with the loſs of a moſt "valuable connection, of a venerable paſ- "tor, who watched long for our ſouls, "and, with the moſt unwearied fidelity, "pointed out to us the path of happineſs. "To you, and to the general intereſts of "pure religion, he was atttached by many "powerful obligations. A native of this "city, and deſcended from a family "which, in former times, had given ſeve- "ral bright ornaments to the Church of "Scotland, he felt the warmeſt tendencies "of nature co-operating, with the princi- "ples of duty, to call forth all his powers "in the ſacred ſervice to which he was de- "voted. And, by the bleſſing of God "on his induſtry, he roſe to an eminence "in profeſſional merit, which has reflect- "ed diſtinguiſhed honour on the city, on "the church, and on the country which "produced him.

"IT was the fortune of Dr. Blair to ap- "pear at a period when the literature of "his country was juſt beginning to re- "ceive poliſh and an uſeful direction; and "when it was emulouſly cultivated by a bright

" bright conſtellation of young men who
" were deſtined to carry it to high perfec-
" tion. In concert with them he applied
" himſelf with diligence and aſſiduity to
" all thoſe branches of ſtudy which could
" contribute to form him for the eloquence
" of the pulpit. This was the depart-
" ment in which he choſe to excel; to
" which all the force of his genius was
" directed; and in which he ſoon felt that
" his efforts were to be ſucceſsful. For
" from the very commencement of his
" theological ſtudies, he gave preſages of
" his future attainments; and, in the ſo-
" cieties of his youthful companions, laid
" the foundations of that ſplendid reputa-
" tion which, through a long life of me-
" ritorious ſervice, continued to increaſe;
" and which has procured for him as a re-
" ligious inſtructor, acceſs to the under-
" ſtandings and the hearts of all the moſt
" cultivated inhabitants of the Chriſtian
" world.

" To you, my brethren, who have
" long enioyed the ineſtimable bleſſing
" of his immediate inſtruction, it will
" not be neceſſary to deſcribe the qualities
" of that luminous, faſcinating eloquence,
" with which he was accuſtomed to
" warm

" warm and ravish, and amend your hearts.
" you may have heard others who equalled,
" or even excelled him in some of the re-
" quisites of pulpit oratory, in occasional pro-
" foundness of thought, in vivid flashes of
" imagination, or in pathetic addresses to the
" heart. But there never was a public teach-
" er in whom all these requisites were com-
" bined in juster proportions, placed under
" the direction of a more exquisite sense of
" propriety, and employed with more uni-
" form success to convey useful and practical
" instruction. Standing on the foundation
" of the Apostles and Prophets, he exhibited
" the doctrines of Christ in their genuine pu-
" rity, separated from the dross of super-
" stition, and traced with inimitable elegance
" through all their beneficial influence on the
" consolation, on the order, and on the virtue
" both of public and private life. Hence
" his discourses, uniting in the most perfect
" form the attractions of utility and beauty
" gave a new and better tone to the style of
" instruction from the pulpit; and contri-
" buted in a remarkable degree to correct
" and refine the religious, the moral, and
" the literary taste of the times in which he
" lived.

" The univerſal admiration which attend-
" ed his miniſterial labours, was ſome re-
" compence to him for the exertions they had
" coſt. But his chief recompence aroſe from
" the conſciouſneſs of having contributed ſo
" eminently to edify the Church of Chriſt,
" and from the improving influence which
" his labours had ſhed on his own heart.
" For he was at home and in himſelf the per-
" fect image of that meekneſs, ſimplicity,
" gentleneſs, and contentment, which his
" writings recommend. He was long happy
" in his domeſtic relations; and, though
" doomed at laſt to feel, through their loſs
" in ſucceſſion, the heavieſt ſtrokes of afflic-
" tion; yet his mind, fortified by religious
" habits, and buoyed up by his native ten-
" dency to contentment, ſuſtained itſelf on
" God, and enabled him to perſevere to the
" end in the active and cheerful diſcharge of
" the duties of his ſtation; preparing for the
" world the bleſſings of elegant inſtruction;
" tendering to the mourner the leſſons of
" divine conſolation; guiding the young by
" his counſels; aiding the meritorious with
" his influence; and ſupporting, by his
" voice and by his conduct, the civil and
" eccleſiaſtical inſtitutions of his Country.

" With

" WITH ſuch diſpoſitions and habits it was " natural that he ſhould enjoy a diſtinguiſhed " portion of felicity. And perhaps there " never was a man who experienced more " completely that *the ways of wiſdom are* " *ways of pleaſantneſs, and that all her paths* " *are peace.* His Country was proud of his " merits, and at different times conferred on " him, through the hands of the Sovereign, " the moſt honourable and ſubſtantial proofs " of her approbation: foreign lands learned " from him the way of ſalvation: he ſaw " marks of deference and reſpect wherever " he appeared: and he felt within himſelf " the gratulations of a good conſcience, and " the hope of immortality. It was peculiar- " ly delightful to ſee him in the lateſt period " of his life, at the venerable age of eighty- " two, looking back on almoſt threeſcore " years ſpent in the Public ſervice of his God, " pleaſed with the recollections which it gave, " poſſeſſing a mind ſtill vigorous and clear, " the delight of his friends, ſenſible to the " attentions which they paid to him, burn- " ing with zeal for the good of the church, " and, with all the ardour of youthful " ambition preparing the materials of a new " claim to the gratitude and admiration of

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